

For a
**MAIDEN
BRAVE**



CC HOTCHKISS

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His face was turned upward to the magnificent creature.

(See page 67.)

FOR A
WIDOW'S HEAVE

FROM THE REV. J. W. WILSON,

Author of "The Widow's Heave,"

and "The Widow's Heave,"

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J. W. WILSON,

Author of "The Widow's Heave,"
and "The Widow's Heave,"

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TO
DR. GEORGE A. EVANS,
OF BROOKLYN,
IN MEMORY OF "DAYS LANG SYNE"
AMONG CHENANGO'S HILLS,
THIS BOOK
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—THE STRANGER	1
II.—AT THE BOTTOM	9
III.—THE MISSION	14
IV.—A LETTER TO A LADY	28
V.—A SNAKE IN THE GRASS	39
VI.—WIT AGAINST WIT	50
VII.—THE CIPHER	60
VIII.—RESCUED BY THE DEVIL	73
IX.—THE TEMPTRESS	87
X.—A DISCOVERY	92
XI.—THE TURN OF THE TIDE	105
XII.—A DUTCH FUNERAL	117
XIII.—THE PLAN	126
XIV.—ACTOR AND ACTRESS	142
XV.—ANNIE KRONJE	150
XVI.—THE RUSE	163
XVII.—MARIAN ROMAYNE	177
XVIII.—WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK	188
XIX.—FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE	203
XX.—ALIAS CAPTAIN COLT	214
XXI.—CLOSE QUARTERS	225
XXII.—THE CORPORATION HOUSE	238
XXIII.—THE BALL	247
XXIV.—FROM PILLAR TO POST	267

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXV.—BANQUO'S GHOST	281
XXVI.—ON BOARD	290
XXVII.—A SEA TRAGEDY	299
XXVIII.—ON THE WRECK	312
XXIX.—CROSSING THE BAR	327
XXX.—THE DEVIL IS SICK	339
XXXI.—THE WAGE OF SIN	353
XXXII.—THE SWAN SONG	363

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
His face was turned upward to the magnificent creature	
<i>Frontispiece</i>	
His fist came down on the table with a bang	21
The temper of the woman was clear	155
“If we must die, let it be together!” she cried . . .	328

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

CHAPTER I

THE STRANGER

“SHALL we take a turn at dice, sir, or shall we try the cards?”

I blushed crimson.

“I think not,” I returned. “In fact, I am hardly prepared——”

“Ah, pardon me; I believe I understand. A lack of cash is not to be wondered at, these times. You will not object to another bottle, however?”

“I must needs object,” I answered, gathering my somewhat muddled wits, for I had tasted nothing stronger than the beer from the college buttery for upward of six months. “To be frank without meaning to be offensive, sir, I am in no position to reciprocate your generosity, and do not wish to be placed under further obligations.”

His glance played over me like lightning; a glance I might have construed into one of either surprise or anger, but if I was about to resent it as the latter, he disarmed me by holding out his hand and saying:

“Your pride is as commendable as it is rare in this part of the country. Let me be frank as well.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

I am a stranger here—detained on business. I obtruded myself because I liked your face—I fancied I saw something familiar. As we have been companions for an hour, perhaps we each have rights unsatisfied. My name is Blair—Philip Blair, of the American forces.”

I took the outstretched hand warmly enough.

“My name is John Chester, sir.”

“A student at Yale, I presume.”

“Perforce, at present. I am from Long Island.”

“Ah, yes; I see,” he returned with the same glance and a quick knitting of the brows, which were smoothed again as quickly. “Cut off from home and an income by the British flotilla. Am I not right?”

I forced a careless laugh.

“Unfortunately, you are. However, like yourself, I have been in the service, and am not a non-combatant from choice. Have you not had enough of this place? I confess I need the air.”

We were in the Assembly, on the street called Court in New Haven. The tavern has long since disappeared, and I have lived to see the once blind alley extended as a broad avenue. But on this day the cool and gloomy coffee-room held a motley crowd which had gathered for the double purpose of escaping the intense heat without and discussing the recent news—the sudden evacuation of Philadelphia by the British, and the probable whereabouts of the French fleet. The noise in the great apartment, the fumes of tobacco, and the heady nature of the wine I had been drinking made me long for the clearer if hotter air outside, and as we arose and

THE STRANGER

passed across the broad and dirty floor my companion noticed my slight limp.

"I think I understand your forced inactivity," he said, offering his arm as we reached the door. "Wounded in service?"

"Nothing so glorious," I answered, pretending not to notice the proffered assistance. "A fall into a ditch on a night march; a broken leg and a sprained ankle. It is enough to hold me from active duty at present, for, unfortunately, we have no cavalry. I hope to be right in a month."

He stopped as we reached the common, and for the first time I had a fair look at him in a broad light. There was that about his countenance which both attracted and repelled me, though his manners were faultless, his voice soft, and his words kindly enough. I would not call him handsome for fear of being thought conceited, for his face—what I could see of it—was so like my own in form of feature and coloring that for the moment I stared in rude wonder. If there was a difference in our eyes, his were a shade darker and moved about as if nothing, even the tremble of a leaf, escaped him. His nose, straight and strong, had that quick dilation and contraction of nostril one marks in a spirited horse. His hair was of a dark chestnut, nearly black, and was tied behind with a simple black knot. The very shape and set of his teeth as he smiled showed a perfect likeness to my own, though the full expression of his mouth and lower face was disguised by a curly black beard which looked to be of recent growth. Though the fashion of the time demanded a smooth face, somehow in him the beard did not seem out of place, only

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

rendering more striking his strong physique. I took him to be eight or ten years my senior, or a man of about thirty-five, for besides an indescribable air of maturity, I noticed a few white hairs near his temples, and his eyes had that expression which comes from experience, a quick temper, or dissipation.

He did not shift under my steadfast gaze, nor did I outrage civility by remarking on our likeness. The slight aggressiveness that arose in me might have been the outcome of the law that like repels like, but as I turned to leave him, saying that the sunshine was too hot to loiter in, he spoke abruptly.

"Pardon me, Mr. Chester, but you say you will join the army when freed from your lameness. Why, then, in the interim, do you not go home?"

"Why did not the mountain go to Mahomet?" I answered, stopping and laughing easily.

"Well, they did get together finally," he returned.

"Aye, and I may finally get home, but there is the broad sound and the cursed patrol you wot of. If I am not there now it is not from lack of trying. There is no communication save by whale-boat, and those expeditions are secret."

"And would you risk the chances in one of these expeditions? I might be able to help you," he answered quietly. "I am not without influence. From what part of Long Island did you say?"

"I have not said," I answered, quickened by his kindness; "but I am from South Oyster Bay, in Queens."

THE STRANGER

He lifted his black brows as if surprised. There was not the slightest hurry to his words as he said (speaking like one in a reverie, his eyes seemingly fixed on the center of the hot common):

"It is probable, then, that you know Judge Thomas Jones, of Tryon Hall; it is possible that you are acquainted with Squire Emberson, who lives——"

"Oh, my prophetic soul!" I broke in, turning on him. "Squire Emberson! Squire Emberson is my uncle—my father, mother, and my all! His home is mine! Do you know him? Have you heard of him? Is he alive? I have had no letter from him for eight months!"

My sudden enthusiasm did not move him. He seemed to weigh each word he spoke—a manner that appeared habitual—but now he brought his eyes to mine as he said:

"I have a slight acquaintance with the squire. There are but few of prominence on Nassau with whom I have not come in contact—that is, before the enemy took control. But I can not answer your questions. I may, however, be able to place you in a position to answer them for yourself. If you wish it I will try. Would you undertake the risk? In doing so you will possibly be in a position to do me a favor in return."

"Faith, that I will," I answered readily, not for a moment looking beyond the possibility of again getting home; "and if I can serve you——"

He interrupted me.

"Yes—yes—I understand. But pardon me if I leave you here. I will see you later. You live——"

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"In the Connecticut Hall." *

"I will possibly look you up. I have no doubt of your mettle, sir. We may yet each serve the other. Good morning."

He held out his hand, grasped mine, rather limply, in the circumstances, and without another word turned and walked down the road.

All this was very strange. I stood and looked after him, nor could I help wondering whether my back resembled his. For withal that we were of a height, there was a certain roundness to his shoulders that mine did not possess, and his steps were short, as if his knees were liable to give way if he strode in a manner befitting his length of limb. One unused to marching, I thought, but perhaps inured to the saddle.

I do not know why I dwelt on these things at that time. I certainly was in no mood to criticize the man whose words and actions had been irreproachable, nor did I go wool-gathering on his possible motive in befriending me. The sudden hope he had aroused, the quick lifting of my depressed spirits, should have put my mind less on his personal appearance than on the matter he had given my head; nevertheless, at that instant I thought more of the stranger's personality than of aught else.

For all man's boast of his free agency, I fancy he is controlled from a point beyond his ken, and in a manner little dreamed of. I mean in trivial incidents, the so-called trivialities looming large in the

* Since 1800 the structure has been known as the "Old South Middle." Of the original buildings of Yale it is the only one left standing.

THE STRANGER

light of subsequent events. If not, why, then, did I stand in the broiling heat of the forenoon sun, looking after and noting the details of my would-be benefactor?

As he approached the pump on the Market Street* I marked him turn his head and glance back furtively, though when he saw I still followed him with my eyes he swung full about, and throwing up his hand in recognition, disappeared around the corner. There was something peculiar in the way it was done. I can not express it in words, but a quick, intuitive feeling came to me that the man knew me much better than I knew him, and that he was suspicious of me, for some unknown reason.

The idea was so intangible, however, that it slipped from my mind, and I started across the common, my head full of the stranger's likeness to myself. The broad stretch of unkempt meadow that has since become a thing of beauty was rank with dock, mullein, and pig-weed that had found congenial footing among the outcropping glacial boulders. Here and there the rough field was broken by groves of parched alders, among which a few cattle sought refuge from the flies. From the lower end of this waste arose the combined State and Court House† with its attendant gaunt whipping-post, its severe plainness of architecture in no way softened by the surrounding desolation. The sun was like fire. The landscape trembled in the rich heat, the leaves on the elms near the college hung well-nigh motionless, and

* Now Chapel Street.

† On the site of the present Trinity Church.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

the only sounds heard were my own footsteps, the strident blare of the locust that cut the hot air like a whip, telling of the fulness of summer, and the myriad of fluttering, humming insects disturbed by my progress through the sparse grass.

CHAPTER II

AT THE BOTTOM

THE year of grace 1778 was, beyond doubt, the most momentous of the Revolution. At its opening, the fortunes of the colonial cause had fallen to their lowest ebb. The army, concentrated at Valley Forge, was but little more than a name, though its vitality and recuperative power were yet to be the wonder of the world. The recent alliance with France, made possible by the surrender of Burgoyne at Saratoga the year before, had galvanized the republicans, if not into new life, into a condition less absolutely hopeless, and this condition had grown into something more positive by the consequent evacuation of Philadelphia and the decided prick administered by Washington to the enemy at Monmouth, on the retreat of the latter across New Jersey.

Although held inactive by physical disability and reduced in spirits by abject poverty, I was an intensely interested observer of political affairs—a fact easily accounted for through the knowledge that Yale had always been a very hotbed of rebellion against the policy of England.

Sent to college by my uncle before the outbreak of hostilities, I had barely passed my first examina-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

tion, when, with a number of my fellows, and the encouragement of the faculty, I joined the Governor's Foot-Guards, and, under the redoubtable Benedict Arnold, marched to Cambridge. There was little patriotism in the act, and, indeed, the word was seldom heard in those days, though it is common enough now. A love of adventure, and a desire to retaliate for the outrage perpetrated by the British at Lexington and Concord, were the motives that moved most of us, and when, after a brief three weeks' tour of duty, we were marched back to New Haven (leaving Arnold behind), I returned to my studies as if nothing had happened. Not one of us dreamed that the action of Gage would have the sanction of the royal Government, and the idea of a separation from the Crown was one against which we would then have recoiled.

After the disastrous defeat of Washington on Long Island in 1776, I heard but rarely from my uncle, communication between us being entirely cut off by land, and soon after, as the British took command of the adjacent waters, it ceased almost completely, and with it ceased my income. It is true that I had received four or five letters from home since that time; straggling letters, evidently sent overland to Southhold, and there trusted to some venturesome spirit who was intent on crossing the sound. Each letter referred to moneys forwarded, but for the space of two years never a shilling of it had reached me. And this was not to be wondered at, as by then hard cash had become a prize for which all fought, and unprotected property rights were little respected by either friend or foe; certainly not by the desper-

AT THE BOTTOM

does who would be willing to run the gantlet of the British flotilla that then laced the broad water stretching betwixt Nassau, or Long Island, and the Connecticut shore.

In the spring of 1777 I answered the call that came to repel Tryon's expedition to Danbury, but we were forwarded tardily, and arrived only in time to see the enemy retreat to their boats, too late to be of service. It was on the homeward march that I fell and broke my leg, and scarcely was I on my feet again when I sprained my ankle in such a manner as almost to disable me completely for months, and from the effects of which I had not fully recovered at the time my story opens.

Therefore, I have never seen regular service, little of warfare, and nothing of battle, nor will my pages be reddened with gouts of blood, thank God! But I have seen much activity and some appalling dangers, and have a tale to tell so strange, so filled with the passions of men, that fighting afield, to me, seems tame beside it.

It is doubtful whether the Almighty has aught to do with mortal strife, for, in my logic, a God of love can not be a God of war. Yet certain it is, that some unknown wisdom directed my future, plucked me from possible glory in the field to set me in a whirlpool of activity where I could serve my country, my own interests, and the cause of individual right in a manner no less honorable, if more obscure.

The Tantalus-like quality of my poverty depressed me in a way that abject hopelessness would not have done. My uncle was well-to-do, even to

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

the point of wealth, and I was aware that I stood to him as a son and would inherit his property, yet not a farthing of my allowance could I come by, and, in fact, neither of us had a knowledge of the condition and whereabouts of the other. I had banked on my prospects until there came an end to the resources of those who knew me, and I was now in extremities, my entire assets being but three crowns, and I owed for past tuition, board, and the shabby clothes that covered my back. My condition was not singular. Though removed from the then seat of war, New Haven, in common with other coast towns, had suffered severely. Nearly every vessel belonging to the port had been destroyed and business interruptions grew to be so frequent, the poverty of the people so general and distressing, that it finally became necessary to suspend the college and dismiss the students until, as read the notice, "*God, in his kind providence, shall open a door for their return to this fixed and ancient seat of learning.*" The archives and library were moved to a place of safety inland, and Yale was deserted by all save a few, who, like myself, still found asylum within its walls. I retained my room in the gloomy Connecticut Hall, remaining more on sufferance than by right. That much and no more had I obtained through my service to the State. Even in the autumn before I had been reduced to a few shillings, and mighty glad had I been to add to them by gathering and selling walnuts and chestnuts. At that time flour had become so scarce that the college steward had advertised for nuts to be ground and made into a sort of bread, and these finally failing, the mid-winter vacation was ex-

AT THE BOTTOM

tended three weeks on account of the lack of food supplies for the students.*

Therefore it may readily be imagined that the stranger's words touched a chord of hope long silent. While his personality aroused my curiosity, I was in no state of mind to criticize his motives even were they other than the kindest. As for our likeness, there appeared to be no possible relationship to account for it. My father and mother having died in my infancy, I knew of no relatives save my uncle (who was my mother's brother) and his sister, the latter the widow of a naval officer, a Lieutenant Colt, who had been lost at sea years ago. I had never seen the widow Colt, or Aunt Cornelia, as she was referred to, nor had there been any intercourse between her and my uncle; and though the latter would not express himself to me (from pride, perhaps), I was perfectly aware that no love was lost between them. Above all, it was certain there was no Blair, near or distant, in my family, and as certain that I had never seen the man before. As I mused in my room that afternoon, I settled the whole matter as being caused by an unaccountable freak of nature, or perhaps that the stranger's resemblance to myself lay more in my imagination than in fact.

* A fact.

CHAPTER III

THE MISSION

THAT night Major Tallmadge arrived from New London, and the force he brought with him camped on the common. They were the Connecticut contingent from the east, on their way to join the main army, and were the finest body of men I had seen for many a day. On the third night they passed on, all but a small detachment left for recruiting purposes, and so strongly had I been affected by their appearance, by the gleam of white canvas striking a strong note on the sunburned common, by the music, the rattle of arms, and the martial air that suddenly pervaded the quiet town, that my desire overcame me and I offered myself for enlistment.

For time had passed, and the little shoot of hope which had sprung to the surface at the words of the stranger was dead of neglect. I had neither seen nor heard of the man calling himself Blair since our first meeting, and my present state had become intolerable—so intolerable, in fact, that weeks before I had made up my mind to essay the passage of the sound alone as soon as my foot was well. This determination had lightened the dreariness of my imprisonment, desperate as would be the venture and problematical its success, for a small boat was beyond

THE MISSION

my reach unless I stole it, and the chances of being made a prisoner by a British cruiser, far from remote. At present the attempt was impossible; home was out of the question, and I determined to join the army.

But my application was refused so promptly, on account of my limp, that my cheeks tingled with the blood that flew to them. For the officer wished to know if I desired the name without the game. Was I after enrolment that I might pocket my bounty and break down inside of twenty miles? By his faith, it looked as if I wanted to join for clothes and food, though he allowed I might run fast enough with the Hessians at my back. The unexpected rebuff, the coarse insult, and the laugh that sprang from the bystanders made me so mad that I turned upon him and damned him to his face. I dared him to step out and I would show him who was the better man, crippled though I was, for I had a trick at the fall which had served me well in sport. The fellow laughed and bettered my curses. Beside myself with rage, I drew out my three crowns—the last coins I possessed—and wagered him I would throw him thrice, straight, or, if he feared me there, I would try a bout with bare fists or even cross broadswords. One's rage is never seasoned with reason, but sometimes it works an advantage. The officer suddenly grew red and stammered while the loungers as quickly became silent, at which I turned to see the cause, and found myself face to face with a tall man dressed in a weather-beaten uniform, his shoulders showing the rank of a field-officer. I knew by instinct it was Major Tallmadge, and shrank into myself, albeit my face still held the flush of my pas-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

sion. The officer's eyes swept me from head to foot in a second, and the ghost of a smile played on his thin lips as he ordered the place cleared. My wrath had been hot, as wrath is under injustice, but little I guessed the recruiting officer had been kind without intention and that for me the time was ripe. I was so thoroughly ashamed of my outburst and the knowledge that behind the major stood a press of people, probably drawn by my loud words, that I edged away without lifting my eyes, though I held my head as high as any one of them. Smarting with chagrin, I started for my own room that I might nurse my wrath in solitude, but I had not passed half the length of the common, when I heard hurried footsteps behind me, and turned to see that my pursuer was no less a person than the man who had been in my thought night and day since I had seen him. It was Blair, himself. Hot and breathless he came up to me. He was somewhat paler than when I first met him, but otherwise unchanged. Without preface or reference to the scene he must have witnessed, he began:

"Mr. Chester, are you of the same mind as when we parted?"

I was in no mood for softness, and hardly for courtesy. In my present temper the interruption to my black thoughts was irritating, my unreasoning vexation at myself extending to all the world. I suddenly disliked the man intensely and without cause, and curtly enough I answered:

"I would go to the devil to get from here, sir!"

"You have the chance," he replied, with a smile that appeared to come from a recognition of the

THE MISSION

double construction that might be put upon his answer. "I have spoken to the major about you. If agreeable, you are to report at headquarters to-night between eight and nine—not earlier."

He looked at me as if hanging on my reply.

"Where is headquarters?" I asked, less roughly than I had answered.

"The Benedict Arnold house."

"Tell the major I'll be there," I said, my grace growing with the seconds, for I appreciated his delicacy in ignoring my late discomfiture. "If my thanks——"

"Never mind them at present," he returned, taking a long breath. "You will see me there. I am happy at having done you a favor. Au revoir."

Though I was now ready enough to question him, he appeared desirous to terminate the interview. He flung off the French words with a little gesture of salute exactly as I would have done. It was like looking at myself in a glass and hearing my own voice, and before I had fully time to realize the fact he had turned and was making his way back through the hot sunshine. I stared after him like one in a dream. With as little stability as smoke in a gale, my bad temper altered its form, and something took possession of me, the character of which I am at loss to determine. It was not joy born of a new hope; far from it. I seemed to be clutched by a sudden something that resembled fear. And yet it was not fear. Rather was it a prophecy, for as I stood there looking abroad, yet seeing nothing of the wide sweep of the common, I knew as well as I know now that my hour had struck, that something new

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

was to come, but what, lay beyond my ken. I aver that I am no coward, and this feeling, powerful though it was, did not ease me of my determination. A moment later I was free from the mental load, and like a man newly born, and with my temper cleared, I went on my way.

If, during the remainder of the day, my body rested my brain worked hard enough, and when night came I made my apparel as brave as my limited wardrobe would allow and sallied forth to the Arnold house, on Water Street.

This was a beautiful mansion, and its situation, facing the bay, made it, to me, the most desirable residence in town. I knew it well—as well as I knew its owner; but at that time it had not the distinction of having sheltered the greatest traitor in history.*

There was no delay to my entrance. A few people, mostly civilians, sat talking in the anteroom as I passed on to the apartment occupied by the major, and when I was shown into this, I was not surprised to see the man Blair in close conversation with the officer. They were alone. A single lamp burned on the table, the corners of the large room being made gloomy by the shade over the light. As the soldier who announced my name backed out, Blair got up and moved away, yet I was perfectly conscious of his near presence, although I could not see him as I advanced to the center of the room. For a moment Major Tallmadge looked at me without speaking, then motioned me to a chair directly beneath the glare of the lamp.

* The house, but little altered, still stands.

THE MISSION

"An' ye are John Chester!" he said, with an abruptness of speech that made each word like a bullet, his keen eyes fixed on me the while.

"Yes, sir," I returned, bowing and limping to the seat indicated.

"God Almighty! The man is *lame*!" he exclaimed. "This will not do, this will not do!" He knitted his brows as if in anger at an attempted deceit.

"It does not greatly handicap me, sir. It is but temporary, at worst," I answered quietly, though I felt I had already lost ground.

"Ye evidently thought so when ye bearded the sergeant this morning. I heard ye, sir! Ye have no lack of impudence, young man. But that aside. I understand ye be well acquainted across the sound; that ye know each foot of the land; that ye have seen service; that ye have a clear head an' a clever tongue which ye know how to control—though I have reason to doubt the latter." His thin lips broadened into a hard smile, but he went on. "I hear, too, that ye be anxious to go to the devil to get from New Haven. Well, well, there be a number going. Do ye wish to act as guide?"

He bent far forward in his chair, his gray eyes fixed steadily on mine. He neither ceased his close observation nor altered his position as he stopped speaking, his lean jaws coming together like a sprung trap.

"For the first, I have evidently been flattered," I answered. "For the second, I fail to understand you entirely."

"Ye would have been a fool had ye pretended

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

as much," he replied, unspringing himself and letting go of my eye as he leaned back. "Had I not witnessed your spirit this morning, sir, I should not have considered ye for an instant to-night. Can ye walk far?"

"It is a slight stiffness, not pain, that causes my limp," I answered. "I can hold my own, I fancy."

"Aye? Well, ye may have a rough test. Your home is near that of Judge Thomas Jones, on Fort Neck, at South Oyster Bay. Will ye guide an expedition to that gentleman's house, an' take all risks?"

"To attack it!" I exclaimed, aghast at the idea, for the judge had long been a friend of my uncle. I had looked upon him as an example of the absolute aristocrat. I knew him to be a Tory in politics, but had no personal dislike for him. Though I bend my knee to no man, I recognized him to be far above me in station.

"Faith, no; not quite that," replied the major. "Have ye made the oath?" he demanded abruptly, shooting the question at me with startling abruptness.

"Yes, sir," I replied with prompt emphasis.

"Then I see we must take ye into confidence a bit. Ye know of the raid that overtook General Silliman, in May, at his house on the Fairfield coast?"

I nodded, for the kidnaping, which was in retaliation for Meigs's successful expedition against Sag Harbor, had been a blow to Connecticut.

"Well, we have no one to exchange for him—no one of equal rank, I mean—an' neither have we two



His fist came down on the table with a bang.

THE MISSION

hundred privates to fill the bill.* We must have him back, and as the honorable judge is a pestilent partizan and the most prominent Tory in reach, we have hit upon him to hold in exchange. Do you follow me, sir? We take him bodily, as Silliman was taken, doing him an' his no injury, an' we need a guide to his house. Ye have the secret now, an' if it gets out I'll see ye hang as high as Haman!"

His fist came down on the table with a bang. His sudden fierceness, which grew as he spoke, and his final threat were not calculated to calm my nerves, but without a thought, and as if I were moved by some power other than my own, I answered before he had caught his breath:

"I understand you fully, sir."

"An' will ye do it?"

"Yes, sir, I will."

He got up from his chair and stood looking down on me for fully a minute, then reseating himself, said with a calmness in marked contrast to his previous vehemence:

"I knew your father, young man, years ago, years ago. If ye be like him an' your wit is as ready as your tongue, ye can be trusted. To be fair with ye, I have looked ye up since first Mr. Blair mentioned ye, then saw ye yonder on the common. I did not know of the limp, though, but on another matter perhaps it will be of service." He paused, and then asked abruptly, "Is your uncle a true man?"

"He was a Whig in '75, sir," I answered; "and

* The tariff in exchange of prisoners during the Revolution was rated so that a colonel equaled 100 men; a brigadier, 200; major-general, 372; and a lieutenant-general, 1,044.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

bearing in mind the set of his jaw and the width of his chin, there is little reason for me to think he has changed his opinion."

"If alive and unscathed by the robbers abroad on Long Island, he has probably changed those that drop from his tongue. I fancy Squire Emberson no fool, at least."

Here he arose from his chair, the act being quick and impulsive, as were all his movements.

Thus far there had been nothing to cause me unusual trepidation. To guide an expedition over a well-known country argued little risk to myself, and the violence of the officer—a violence which was, as I afterward knew, nothing but a mannerism—was insufficient to account for the thumping of my heart. But thumping it was, and almost painfully, too—God knows for what reason; it had never before been so obtrusive, and I certainly was not under the influence of fear at that moment. Thinking the interview ended by the rising of the officer, I, too, came to my feet and felt the relief of movement.

"When shall I be wanted?" I asked.

"To-night is Wednesday. Ye will start at dusk Friday. Ye will be under the orders of Captain Hawley. But of that anon. Sit down, sir; I am not yet done with ye."

I reseated myself, and he walked across to an open desk barely visible in the shadow. I heard him pulling papers hither and thither, and through the silence caught his muttering. Finally he struck his forehead with his open palm and said aloud:

"Where have I put those Annie Kronje papers?"

THE MISSION

As if the answer came with the question, he smote his forehead again and knelt to open a black portmanteau beneath the desk. As he got to his feet I saw two or three papers in his hand, and he was coming toward me when he stopped half-way. Turning to the corner of the room, he said:

“Faith, Mr. Blair, are ye still here? I thought ye gone. Kindly give me your absence till I have finished with this young gentleman.”

Blair made no answer, but I heard the door open and shut very softly. As the latch fell the major came to the table. Drawing a chair close to mine, he laid a hand on my knee, his manner altering to a low-voiced confidence.

“My lad, I said I knew your father, and I did, for I am a Nassau man myself. Now it is from believing ye are of the stripe of your parent that I am about to open a matter on which ye must be dead, so far as breathing a word about it goes. Besides, Blair vouches for ye, and I have no reason to distrust him. Let me ask, are ye equal to a little quiet service across the sound? I mean beyond being a guide. Say no like a man, if ye spleen at it.”

I fetched a long breath at this and was conscious of the severe scrutiny of his eye as mine wandered.

“I will attempt aught that is honorable,” I finally answered, returning my gaze to his.

“It is not to spy,” he said quickly; “though ye must get information if ye can; some will likely be given ye second-hand. Yet I count spying as no dishonor. Do ye think Nathan Hale would have lowered himself? Fire may be met by fire; it is necessary at times. Read this.”

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

He selected a paper from the sheaf in his hand, put it into mine, and then, as if to avoid distracting my attention, he arose and began walking to and fro. I unfolded the heavy blue sheet and read as follows:

“To Major Tallmadge, at New London:

“I am in receipt of a letter from the Provincial Governor of New York, stating that the last confidential officer has been exchanged from the vicinity of Brookland. Through the activity of A——K—— much more has been collected than the exchanged prisoner could carry in secrecy, and the remainder is awaiting some mode of conveyance into our lines. I have been applied to for assistance, and transmit this to you as one understanding the requirements and having charge of the coast of this State, hoping you can place your hand on some party who is fitted to communicate in person with the lady in question. This does not necessitate penetrating the enemy's lines, as you may see by the enclosed paper, which you will read, remember, and destroy as soon as you have acted.

“I am authorized to promise a pecuniary reward for such service, or possibly a commission if the individual possesses the necessary qualifications.

“I am, sir, your most obed'n't serv't,

“JONATHAN TRUMBULL,

“Gov. of Connecticut.”

As I reread this plainly written, though, to me, somewhat ambiguous communication, I felt that I was becoming involved in a matter which would carry me far deeper than my expectations had led me.

THE MISSION

At that moment I thought less of danger than of my ability to meet the requirements. Had it been purely a spying mission, I should doubtless have refused it on account of my inexperience, though not because of the great risk involved; for I hold that man a clod, and useless in any venture, who is forever looking to the safety of his own skin, and thinking less of the consequences of success than of the risk involved in obtaining it. But danger had not been mentioned. Therefore I considered the matter one demanding more of diplomacy than aught else, and knowing my own nature, I knew I was too upright and downright, too impulsive and lacking in tact, to make a success of a mission in which there was to be much fine lying, though the reward of a commission in the army fairly dazzled me. On the other hand, if I refused the charge, be it what it might, I should probably fall so far in the respect of the fiery officer who was still pacing the room that I should even lose the chance of acting as a guide, and so be relegated to the obscurity of my old life, a thought that was intolerable. As I folded the paper the major stopped before me.

“There, my lad, is an opportunity to win your spurs. Were I shaking a free foot I should like nothing better than to go myself, but I have more to look after than pounds and shillings.”

“I gather little from this letter, sir,” I answered, “but if you think I am fitted, I will act. I am certainly willing to serve the cause. I have attempted to serve it in the field, but through accident have failed.”

“I think ye well fitted,” he returned, “being a

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

lad of education, of good family, and having a home on the ground to account for your presence. How far is Emberson's from Tryon Hall?"

"Not more than three miles by road, sir."

"Then only twenty from Jamaica! Aye, well fitted, indeed, and the limp may be a good foil. Ye are not asked to go in disguise, to use force, nor to make a way into the British lines. Only to take charge of moneys that have already been gathered from timid friends and which will be brought to ye; also to take such information as has been gleaned from the enemy by the woman mentioned, who fears no more to be called a spy than she does to act the part. This money is needed by the army—ye may guess how much—and so is the information. Ye are to bring back both as soon as may be—that's all. There are many on that stricken island who are Tories only in mouth. They have contributed cash instead of services, and as ye will see, we have not all of it. There are also many who would jump at this chance, but few who have your qualifications in knowledge of the land and a home on the spot; in fact, there are few I would trust. Gold is damned sticky stuff, nowadays. Are ye ripe for it?"

As he spoke my doubts grew less. I saw no reason to hesitate. The service seemed small for the reward offered, even inadequate; there appeared nothing demanded beyond common intelligence, secrecy, and a trifle of nerve. I sealed myself at once by a nod and a word. At this he drew his chair close to mine, laid his hand on my knee again, and placed his mouth to my ear.

"Ye are a wise youth and have done well for

THE MISSION

yourself," he whispered. "May ye do as well for the cause as I think ye will. I am not to tell ye all I know. It is unnecessary. Neither am I going to weight ye with so much as a written scrap, for misfortune might befall ye on the way to Jones's. Now, listen. When ye get the chance ye are to go to Jamaica and find there a Dutchman, one Killian Brouer. Ask him where ye can come by Annie Kronje, the A—— K—— of this letter. Remember that name, and when he asks ye what ye want of her, say the words that ye are after the sinews of war—the sinews of war. If he asks what more, as likely he will, tell him it's none of his damn business. Ye will see what comes of it. That is your key and that is all, and it is simple enough."

"Aye, that is simple enough," I returned. "And who is Annie Kronje?"

"I know no more of her than do ye," he answered. "Probably a Dutch huyker who has more brains than falls to the lot of her class. These are my instructions, such as I am allowed to give, and this makes an end to the business. Keep it as if ye were dead; otherwise ye know what might happen to the brave woman yonder, and to ye, my lad, to ye as well, for there would be little mercy shown ye. Now go. Be here Friday by sundown, and as ye pass out bid Blair back to me. Good night!"

CHAPTER IV

A LETTER TO A LADY

It was a curt dismissal, but in my present state of mind not unwelcome. Blair looked keenly at me as I came out, offering me his hand, which I took as I delivered my message. Doubtless he would have held me a minute had I given him encouragement, and as doubtless, too, he saw by my face that I had been charged with something out of the common.

But I was in no mood to be detained, desiring only to be alone that I might think it all out, and so I left him abruptly.

I had been schooled to self-reliance—which is good for any man—but was new to the matter of doing a momentous thing and doing it in secret. Secrecy had never been my forte, but now it was suddenly thrust upon me and made a matter of life and death. To say I lay awake that night would not be true, being too healthy in body and brain for such foolishness, but the next day passed in a dream, a haze, though at the end I had considered so thoroughly the matter given me that by night it had lost its novelty as a thought and had become commonplace. This would have done much to steady me had steadiness been needed, but so hateful had become the life I was living that I would have accepted a release

A LETTER TO A LADY

on any fair terms. For upward of a year I had been but existing, moldering among books in hopeless apathy, buried by forced inactivity and poverty, like a clam in the mud, and now I joyed in my prospective freedom. I assured myself my mission should lose nothing through fault or fear of mine. I would go the whole pace. Little I dreamed the speed of it or where it would take me, and, to be true, yet modest withal, in the new and hot rush of my youth, little I cared.

Like the day, the evening was warm and close, albeit the sky was cloudless, its velvety depth rendered more beautiful by the moon nearing its full. Coatless, I leaned out of my window to get the faint air stirring and drink in the beauty of the world. But for a chirping tree-toad in an elm near by and the fine night sounds that came from the wide field of the common, there was nothing to break the impressive stillness. Presently I caught the sound of footsteps echoing up the barren stairs and through the hollow hall. I could hear the shuffling of two men coming along the passage and my own name called. Drawing in my head, I lighted a candle, and the strengthening glow showed me the face of Mr. Philip Blair and that of a student named William Chandler. The former I was honestly glad to see, conceiving we should have much to talk about, but I confess to a mingling of keen surprise and disappointment as I caught sight of the perpetually smiling face of his companion.

Chandler was a man perhaps a year older than myself. He was a classmate, but was one of the few of my fellows with whom I had nothing to do. When

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

the political pot boiled over in 1775, he had been an avowed royalist, his entire family, then living in New Haven, being of the same kidney. The college committee of students which had called him to appear and explain his attitude, had been openly flouted, broadly insulted in his refusal to obey, and in consequence his name was publicly posted as a traitor. From that day he was ostracized as completely as if he had no identity, albeit he steadily continued his studies and attendance at class, and for eight months brazened it out. At the end of that time either his resolution weakened or good sense came to his rescue, for he applied for reinstatement, recanted, apologized to the committee, and, with more or less heartiness, had been accepted by the majority, of which, I may say, I was not one. Without regarding my lack of cordiality, he was always effusive to me, always smiling, always good-natured, and never took offense at an affront, and I gave him not a few. This temper I fancied might easily have been probed to the bottom, but as he was now a most radical republican in sentiment, he made his way well enough, though I had little respect for him, and less liking.

Therefore I was ill pleased and constrained at his advent, and as if the fact had been announced by some subtle mental process, Blair at once attempted to explain the presence of his companion by saying he had acted as a guide to my quarters, and for a further reason that Chandler was to have a seat in the coming expedition to Long Island. Had he struck me in the face it would not have surprised me more than the latter statement, and I was about to express myself when it came to me that the man

A LETTER TO A LADY

was under my own roof and, for the time at least, entitled to the laws of hospitality, especially as I was unable to denounce him on any tangible ground. If Major Tallmadge had consented to his enlistment in the enterprise, it was not for me to protest. Therefore I made my grimace to myself and welcomed both while wondering at the coming of either.

For my room no apology was necessary. I had furnished it in my flush days, and my poverty had in no way despoiled it. It was the one spot in which I took comfort, and its furniture did not reflect the shabbiness of my person. I marked Blair glance comprehensively about, his eye resting a moment on the portrait of my uncle. It flitted away only to go back to it, at which I satisfied his apparent curiosity by explaining whom it represented. My words seemed to bring him to a point, for he directed his full attention to me at once, and said:

“Mr. Chester, you have desired to thank me for what you may be pleased to call my good offices, and when the subject of doing you a favor was first broached I more than hinted that you could make a fair return. Do you remember?”

“I remember perfectly,” I answered, but helped him no further, for Chandler, with an irritating grin that seemed to have been born with him, sat opposite, his eye on me.

“Then let me be brief in this,” Blair continued, with a slight uneasiness, as he hitched his chair closer to the table on which stood the candle. “I have written a letter which I wish—which I will place in your hands and ask you to deliver in person—in per-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

son—that it may reach directly the one to whom it is addressed.”

The man raised his dark eyes to mine and looked at me intently. The glow of the candle brought out his every feature, and so near was he that I had a fair chance to study him—to study each form and character in his face in a manner hitherto impossible. He was either ailing or had slept little, for a fine dark shadow lay in the hollow under each eye—such a shadow as might come from illness or a night of dissipation—and the flesh on his cheek-bones bore a yellowish cast. Under close scrutiny he was not prepossessing. I withdrew my direct gaze that I might not be offensive, and answered:

“Yes, certainly I will do so if it is in my power. To whom is it addressed?”

He put his hand into his pocket and drew out a sheet folded in all directions and fixed with a heavy splash of red wax. Tilting it a moment in his fingers, he turned it and read aloud:

“ ‘Miss Josephine Cowan,

“ ‘Fort Neck, South Oyster Bay, . . .

“ ‘Long Island.’ ”

“Not far from my destination, sir!” I exclaimed in surprise as he looked up at me.

“It is your destination!” he answered with emphasis; then before I could speak he continued: “Unfortunately, the lady is in the house you are going to raid, and it is this fact that demands the favor I am about to ask.”

He hesitated as if at a loss for words, wet his lips with his tongue, and went on:

A LETTER TO A LADY

"If, sir, you feel beholden to me you will requite your debt by promising to deliver this *before—before* the house is set upon. Stop!" he said, as I started to my feet in dumb protest; "hear me through. As a man devoted to the cause, as a gentleman and an officer, for an officer I am, notwithstanding my present dress, I assure you, you may do this without fear of dishonor. As a youth of sense, you may surmise the possible relation between this lady and myself. My duty keeps me here. I can not protect her, but it will add to her confidence, her sense of security, if she is assured through this of her personal safety. This is the main part of the letter, and this you have a right to know. For the rest, it is a matter of—to be frank—of the affections. Your delicacy will appreciate my position. The lady is playing a part, as is another you wot of, and must not be known, neither must she be molested. Need I say more? I ask you to deliver this before the raid for the one reason given, and because it may go so hard with you as to be impossible later."

"As for the latter," I returned, "there is little for me to fear. I shall take no part in the action. I act as guide only, and shall not even be armed. You may be sure of its ultimate delivery."

"May I not rely on you to deliver it as requested? It is possible, perhaps. I would have given this to Mr. Chandler or Captain Hawley, but they are unknown to the household and, moreover, are under no obligations to me."

At that moment I was glad he had restrained me in time to prevent my making a fool of myself by what would have appeared to be mock-heroics. If

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

I had any suspicions of the man they were still latent. I now saw in his words nothing but a lover desiring to communicate with his sweetheart and being forced by circumstances to take the easiest method. His selection of me had been but natural, and if I had any objections to being the bearer of the letter it was solely because I knew of no such lady as Josephine Cowan in the judge's household. This I told him.

"You have not been at home for three years or more," was his ready explanation. "With but short periods of absence, Miss Cowan has been a member of the Jones family for more than twelve months."

"Very good, sir," I returned. "In that case I will do your bidding if circumstances allow. I can guarantee nothing, as you know."

"Yes, of course, I know I take chances. We shall be quits in any event."

He still twirled the paper, and a slightly awkward silence fell—a silence no one seemed inclined to break. Chandler had not uttered a word since his greeting and seemed disinclined to volunteer a remark. I looked at Blair, wondering as to the nature of the brown study into which he seemed to have drifted. His hands rested on the table in the full light of the candle, that now and then flared as an insect from without circled around and darted into the flame. I noticed the nervous play of his fingers and the draw of the sinews over his small knuckles. If his face was like mine his hands were not; they were long and thin, and the back of the left one near the wrist was adorned with a small blue anchor pricked into the flesh, sailor fashion. As I marked the device I pointed at it.

A LETTER TO A LADY

"Ah, I fancy you have been of the sea!" I said, trying to force the conversation, for of other entertainment I had none to offer.

"Never," he replied, with a quick return to the present. "It was a boyish prank; one that I have regretted."

He took a long breath and tossed the letter in front of me.

"Will you carry this with the rest of your papers?" he asked, leaning back easily and speaking as if the question was of small consequence.

"The rest of my papers!" I exclaimed, as I got to my feet for the purpose of putting the document in the pocket of my coat, which lay on the bed.

"Yes. I refer to those given you by Major Tallmadge; those of a private nature."

I was about to answer that I had received no papers, private or otherwise, when it occurred to me that even that information might be beyond my orders to be as one dead regarding all that had passed between the officer and myself. If, as was evident, Major Tallmadge had not taken Blair into his confidence regarding my extra mission, it would be unbecoming for me to do so. This came to me in the brief interval of crossing the room, and I turned to my visitor.

"Well, and why do you ask?"

"Because, sir, as an old campaigner—one who has profited by experience—I was about to advise you——"

"Ah!" I interrupted. "Have you, too, been in secret service? I did not suspect it."

"I have overshot myself a trifle, I fear, but I

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

beg you not to mention your present suspicion elsewhere. You can readily conceive that were it known it might impair my usefulness to the cause. I was about to suggest before I leave you—and I am somewhat hurried—that you do no such foolish thing as to carry papers concealed in your hat. One's hat is easily lost, and in case of your capture, like your boots and the linings of your clothes, it will be thoroughly examined. Besides being about the first to be looked over, what you carry in your boots is liable to be ruined by wet. You can hardly expect to complete your mission dry shod."

I noticed his fingers were beating a tattoo on the table the while he was speaking, though his voice bore none of the nervousness his movements betokened.

"And what would you advise?" I asked, as I returned to my chair.

"I should certainly advise you to keep anything of a secret nature in your coat pocket. It is the safest place. If you are taken at sea a coat is easily thrown overboard; a stone in the pocket will sink it at once. If on land, the matter is ready at your hand to be destroyed in a hurry. Even this letter I have given you, should it be discovered by the enemy, would effectually foil any further expedition against Jones; he would be forewarned, and consequently forearmed. The other matter is even more important, and should be in a position to be placed beyond the reach of capture. I think you will see the force of my suggestion. Now if you——"

He stopped suddenly, and I looked at him in wonder. His color changed to a dirty white, and as he ceased speaking his eyes rolled in his head. With

A LETTER TO A LADY

a convulsive motion he clutched at his bosom and fell back in his chair with a feeble exclamation.

So dumfounded was I at this sudden and totally unlooked for episode that I failed to offer my services on the instant, and before I could gather my wits and run for the ewer, Chandler had drawn a pocket flask and presented it to the lips of the stricken man. But the collapse had not been complete, and recovery was rapid. As I suggested Blair's removal to the bed, and was about to help lift him, his face showed returning color and he waved me off. Presently he pulled himself upright and leaned forward, his hands clasped over his eyes. He was shaking like one in a palsy and his nails were blue, but another draft of liquor brought him more vigor and enabled him to speak.

"I must ask pardon for the trouble I have caused," he said, with a feeble, apologetic smile, his hands still trembling from weakness. "I have some defective action of the heart—slight, I fancy, but enough to keep me from great activity. I have not suffered an attack like this for months. It must be the heat. If you will excuse me, I will get to the open air."

He declined my proffered assistance, and shortly after took Chandler's arm and went to the door, walking like an aged man. Once there he turned to me and held out his hand.

I shall never forget him as he appeared at that moment, his black beard accentuating the pallor that still overspread his face, the slight gleam of his teeth as he spoke, and his eyes, which were never still. His fingers were clammy and his grasp limp as I shook

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

hands with him. Had I but known it, his collapse was a prophecy.

“Accept assurances of my appreciation of your kindness, sir,” he said. “I trust this will not be our last meeting. I hope not—I hope not.” And without waiting for an answer, or with more than a conventional salutation, the two went down the well-worn stairs, leaving me holding the candle with which I had lighted them away.

CHAPTER V

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS

THAT there is no such thing as luck I am well assured. The throw of a die and the turn of a card is as much a matter of law as the rising of the sun and its consequent setting. It is because we can not follow the sequence of this law in small events that we misname it chance, but it is still an unbroken chain that forever binds us, its beginning being as far back as the beginning of time. It may be the law of Divine purpose, and if it was ever evident to me, it was in the method in which this expedition had been conceived and was carried out—evidenced not at the outset, but at the end, the manner being at first mercifully hidden. It was shown in the very way I made my small arrangements. For some time I weighed in my mind what to carry, and finally decided on donning my best clothes (which were none too good in fashion and somewhat the worse for wear). Besides Blair's letter I took not a scrap of paper, nor anything else, for that matter, save a pipe and tobacco, together with a tinder-box, jack-knife, and my three crowns. I determined to fly light. I had debated on the advisability of keeping my uncle's letters by me, but decided it was better to have nothing beside the note I was commissioned to deliver,

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

and this was less my wisdom than the finger of fate, for I had two minds to put the whole batch in my pocket to show the squire how poorly I had fared in the way of correspondence. I had the wit to bind my weak ankle with a broad bandage that it might be well supported, and after delivering my books and other belongings to the verger for safe-keeping, I made one or two farewell calls, and by sunset was again on Water Street, wending my way to the place of meeting.

I saw neither Major Tallmadge nor Blair, though I had hoped for a last word with the officer, and before dusk was fairly over the land we were off. As I took my place in the boat, Chandler stooped and picked up a stone the size of my fist, holding it toward me with a significant look, and having in mind the wisdom of Blair's suggestion, I slipped it into my pocket, though it soon became such a nuisance that I placed it in the boat's bottom, where it would be handy in case of mischance.

Save myself, every man was armed, but as I was only to guide, and, moreover, owned no weapon, I was defenseless, and that much freed from carrying weight, an advantage I was not slow to appreciate. In the crowd that had assembled to see us off, I looked in vain for Blair, and though I would have liked another minute's conversation with him I was not greatly distressed at his non-appearance. An inquiry from Chandler brought out the information that the fainting spell had been a prelude to a fit of sickness and that at noon our friend had been too ill to leave his bed.

The boat we were in was a new one, and being

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS

thirty feet long by some six abeam, was the largest of its kind I had ever seen. Roomy as it was, twenty armed men (which is more than three times the normal crew of a whale-boat) completely filled it, bringing it low in the water and causing us to move slowly. Barring a long swell, the sea was smooth, and the moon, broadening to complete fulness, swung aloft, a magnificent jewel, the final touch to a perfect summer night—a quiet night, a night for peace, for love and lovers. The air was touched with the tang of brine that drifted inshore with the flood of the tide, and though hot and still, was less smothering in its quality than on land.

So long as we were within the harbor there was no attempt at discipline. Loud jokes were followed by louder laughter that echoed from the shore. Scraps of ribald song and not a few oaths jarred the holy calm of the evening, and to me it was evident that my companions were either careless of the danger they were about to incur or were thus relieving the strain of tightened nerves. When at last the lighthouse, with its little star, lay well on our larboard quarter, when the roll of the seas had become longer and the land we had left was but a black smudge on the horizon, Captain Hawley, who stood at the steering oar, sharply demanded silence and ordered no one to speak above a whisper, and by this command, the firm set of his mouth, and the way his eye swept the unlimited expanse about us, I knew that at last we had entered the outer zone of danger.

There was an uncanny beauty in the night. But for the moon and a few faint stars, the sky was a dark void unbroken by a rag of floating cloud. The

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

water lay blue-black about us, its distance interminable and mysterious. Out from the vast cavern of the east rolled the long, low ocean swells that lifted us gently with a slight sidelong lurch. It was as if we heaved to the breathing of a great breast, so regular, so soft, the rise and fall of the wide waste of water. The unwrinkled billows, here and there touched by the crisp light from above, flashed out as though the moonbeams had shot off molten metal, and once in a while, from the depth of the black water, drove a sharp line of phosphorescence as some startled fish fled from our track. The sea was as blank as the sky, and we seemed to be sliding along a world deserted save by ourselves. The silence came down like a blanket. The muffled oars churned softly, and the only things that now broke the death-like quiet were the hard breathing of the rowers, the occasional swirl of a blade as it tore the surface of the deep, and the tinkling fall of the drops as they were sheared into the air by the sharp cutwater of the boat's stem.

Instead of soothing my nerves, the hush seemed to intensify a growing excitement within me. Inactive, I lay in the stern-sheets under the shadow of the steersman. Chandler was near by, also unemployed, while on the after-thwart and facing me sat the only other man I knew, one named Cogswell, a stocky youth whose face was a passport to good-will, aye, who was worthy of the best a man can give a man—I mean affection. I did not know it then, but, unkennered by me, the bond was between us. The muscles on his bared arms stood out like straps and the perspiration showed in great beads, as he tugged

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS

with mighty power at the larboard stroke, his broad hands made broader as they grasped the loom or handle of the oar.

With barely a break in the rhythmical movement of the rowers, we went on for some two hours; then a breeze crept from the north and grew in strength, the sea dancing in a million sparkles. At this a spritsail was set, the canvas having been stained a yellow brown in tan-pit liquor that it might be invisible at a distance. The rowers rested and we swept along at increased speed, soon the faint lifting of the land ahead showing we were making great progress.

From the harbor to the coast of Long Island it is twenty-five miles as the crow flies, and to our final destination on the shore of the Great South Bay some twenty-five miles more. I did not for a moment conceive we should go ashore at the nearest point from New Haven and make the rest of the way afoot, when by skirting the shore westward we might save many miles of tramping. I had thought the matter of landing fully determined upon before starting, but it now became apparent that the settlement of this detail had been omitted, probably for the reason that there could be no knowing the conditions besetting us as we approached the shore.

It must have been eleven o'clock, and Long Island lay a great dark bar athwart our bows, when Captain Hawley, who had hardly spoken since his demand for silence, bent down to me.

"Mr. Chester, you are familiar with these waters, what's your wisdom as to a landing-place?"

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

The question was a surprise, but before I could weigh the matter Chandler answered for me.

"I take Cold Spring to be the spot, captain. It is the shortest cut by land from there to Jones's."

"Speak when yer spoken to, young man," answered Hawley. "You show yer qualifications as a guide by advising a step that would put us in limbo before we could fairly land. Do you not know of the British works about Huntington?"

"Aye, ye ass!" interposed Cogswell. "Are ye but just hatched? Be not so glib with yer tongue."

The everlasting smile faded from Chandler's face in an instant, and more abashed than I had ever seen him, he muttered an apology and relapsed into a sullen silence, though his sulks did not long endure.

"From Lloyd's Neck westward the British are as thick as tar," said the captain, ignoring the interruption, "and perhaps some distance eastward as well since last reports. Can you tell me a point where we can make the boat safe to find on our return, and within, say, twenty-five miles from Jones's?"

"I should suggest Stony Brook, in Smithtown Bay," I answered. "From there I know the country thoroughly. The woods come thick to the shore and the coast is wild and little visited, unless, of course, matters have changed."

"'Tis the spot I had in mind," he answered. "I am glad to be corroborated."

We sailed on. It was past midnight when we turned into the shallow bay called Smithtown, and here I was told to take the helm and put the boat in at a proper landing.

I was perfectly at home here, for I had sailed the

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS

sound as boy and youth and knew this part of it as well as I knew the waters of the Great South Bay, which stretched away within rifle-shot of my uncle's house. In an hour the boat was beached on the sandy spur of a cove that runs a mile inland, and almost in the shadow of the somber woods we landed. There was no indication of a coast-guard or watch of any kind, and the shore, being low, afforded no spot for fortifications. So far all had gone well, and for aught I could see it was now plain sailing.

Once in a while we take a hand at looking into the future, and the trouble we borrow is usually but a shadow that fades as we approach it. It is that thing we do not look for that possesses the most substance, and so it was with me, for it was here, in fancied security, that I felt the blow that waked me from my sleep—a blow unguessed, a trivial thing in itself, yet one that altered my whole life.

Being no laggard, I hung my coat on a limb near the wood's edge and set about doing my share toward concealing the boat. One man, whom I did not know, was detailed to stand by the arms and clothing left behind while the rest bent, and lifting the light vessel, carried it into the blackness of the forest, which here was primeval in its density, and is but little less to this day. Hardly were we within its shadow when Hawley ordered me to return to the shore and take no risk with my ankle at such work. Nothing loath, back I went by a short cut, only to find the beach deserted. The clean, soft sand made no noise under my feet, and thinking that perhaps the guard was lying down, I walked toward the pile of clothing and arms. As I advanced from behind the tongue of

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

timber that here made to a point, I came upon him suddenly, and stopped at the sight that met my eyes. He had gone to the edge of the wood and was working on my coat, which I had hung apart from the rest, feeling through the pockets so hurriedly, but with such evident interest withal, that I was dumfounded. It was Chandler, and so near him was I that as plainly as I see the words I am writing I saw him draw out Blair's letter and turn it toward the moon that he might read the address. The document evidently had no interest for him, for he replaced it, and then, inch by inch, went over the lining of the garment, bending and feeling it, until hardly a thread of the fabric had escaped the scrutiny of his fingers.

At first I watched from curiosity, then with a growing indignation, but when he tackled the lining the matter of his search leaped at me. He was after papers concealed, and what but those he thought the major had given to me, and the possession of which I had been careful not to deny? What else could it be? And had Blair— The idea that entered my head was so stunning that I felt its absurdity, but the work of the sneak, and my own conjectures, were interrupted by the return of a number of the crew.

Evidently satisfied that the coat contained nothing of value to him, Chandler turned at the noise, and with a low whistle began walking up and down as if patrolling a beat.

My first impulse was to leap on the would-be thief and throttle him then and there, a thing I might easily have done, my strength making me more than a match for him. But a second thought showed me

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS

that, as I now held the whip-hand of the fellow, it would be both wisdom and policy to wait. Had it been any one else I might have acted, but with him it was different. I should gain little, and stood a chance to lose much, by denouncing him or using violence, for he doubtless had enough ingenuity to account for his act as a mistake in garments, and as I had lost nothing I should be on slippery ground in making an accusation, besides putting him on guard against me. He, in turn, might take to denouncing, and place me in a false position by stating the undeniable fact that I bore a letter to the house we were about to assault. I was well known only to Cogswell, and my position would be equivocal at best. Though I was at a loss how to act at this juncture, there was no question as to Chandler's duplicity. Curiosity alone would not account for his careful search of my coat, and any other motive sprung either from personal spite or the fact that he was a traitor. Either was a plausible supposition, but I determined to bide my time, feeling sure he would finally uncover himself by some further overt act.

I here took my first lesson in dissembling and bore myself as if nothing had occurred, though had it been broad day there is little doubt that the sneak would have read my face to some purpose.

When the boat was finally bestowed, I was placed at the head of the column that was to move in single file, and taking my bearings from the compass, we plunged into the darkness of the woods.

Betwixt sand and underbrush it was terrible going for the first hour, but finally we got into the road that leads to Smithtown, and a halt was called while

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

we refreshed ourselves. Here Chandler, all smiles again, once more became glib with his tongue and suggested to me that it would be better to go to the village and take the main highway west, but now, with my suspicions having become a certainty and believing that an open rupture would cause the fellow's disappearance, and that, if my estimate of him was right, he would desert, get in advance, and by warning Jones, place the expedition in jeopardy, I quietly explained that there was a path which entered the main highway some two miles farther on, and by continuing across the present road we should flank the town and any detachment that might, perchance, be there. He had too much wit to protest, and thereby bring Hawley upon him again, and so on we went.

By this the moon had swung well west, the air had grown cool, and all night sounds had ceased. The woods being more open and the soil firmer we made better time, but I was ready enough for the dawn, which would be our signal to halt, for my ankle was beginning to be painful. Mile after mile we toiled on, sometimes by road, at others taking to the woods and fields to flank a house. Through streams, bogs, and plowed land we went, and when at last we struck a clear brook, and the heavens were broad with the light of day, Hawley ordered a halt in the depths of an extensive thicket. We had made fifteen miles, by dead reckoning, and almost in a straight line.

We camped not far from the road and a watch was set near it. I bathed my foot in the cold stream, which relieved the pain at once, and then lay down with the others. But I could not sleep. Though

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS

my body needed rest, my brain would have none of it; there was too much for it to work over, for stronger and stronger grew the idea that the man Blair was behind Chandler, and bit by bit I tried to piece it out. But reason, running counter to my instinct, repelled the attempt. Blair was known to Tallmadge and was working for the cause. The only things against him which I could lay hold of was his desire to have me deliver a private letter at the house we were to attack, his concern regarding the papers he thought I carried, and his evident friendship for Chandler. His likeness to myself, his tender of good offices, his flattery of me to the major, and his nervousness and subsequent collapse, were no arguments against him; neither was the consciousness that I rather disliked him despite the fact that from appearance we might have been twins. I tried to drop it all and sleep, but could not.

Finally Chandler moved from his position and lay down within a yard of me. Hoping he would do something by which I might damn him, I remained still, but whether he had his doubts of the genuineness of my slumber or feared to be observed by others, I know not; anyway, he let me alone.

CHAPTER VI

WIT AGAINST WIT

I AM fairly quick with my hands, and my head has stood me in good stead once or twice, though the latter is not of the sort that flashes out a path through difficulties, after the manner of a genius. I felt that in the case before me I was hopelessly befogged and needed the brains of another to straighten my logic as well as give me advice, for I confess I was at my wits' end as to how to act, and all because I was certain that Chandler was a traitor to the cause he pretended to serve and I was in no position to denounce him.

Though I did not sleep I finally fell into a kind of waking doze, through which my faculties lived more or less alert. I was perfectly conscious that Chandler still lay near me, and of this I was glad, as my growing fear was that he would desert. In this fashion, with benumbed senses, I rested, at least until a shaft of sunshine drifted through the foliage above me and smote my cheek. When it crept to my eyes the dazzle and heat became unbearable. I sat up, rubbing my lids as if just awakening, and as I did so Chandler followed suit, smiling as was his wont, and making some trivial remark as if to justify his irritating grin.

WIT AGAINST WIT

At that moment my head came to my rescue. I was feeling for the letter in my coat, which had served as my pillow, when the inspiration came. The letter was there all right, but as if startled, I clapped my hands to my chest and jumped up with a low exclamation, going swiftly through my pockets as if looking for something missing. As I hoped, Chandler became interested, his smile dying as he looked up.

“What’s ado, Chester?”

“Enough, the Lord knows!” I replied abstractedly, going over my clothes again in the desperate fashion of one who will not realize a loss.

“Faith, it must have been at the beach! Say, Chandler, you guarded the duds; did you see aught of a paper on the sand near where hung my coat? I had one—dark blue, like the letter you know of. It was in my waistcoat, and I took it out when about to help with the boat. I thought to put it in my coat for fear of losing it in the wood. I remember perfectly; but, by Jehovah! I must have slid it into a fold instead of the pocket, and it fell! Not for fifty pounds would I have lost it!”

He took the bait readily and was wide-awake at once.

“Was it of much worth?” he asked.

“Worth! Aye, in one way,” I answered dejectedly, “in another way, of no moment. I happen to know the contents by heart, but it would be a serious thing if it fell into certain hands.”

“I take it you mean those papers Blair referred to?” he asked guardedly.

“Yes, yes; I forgot you were there. Yes, I mean

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

just those. It is too late to go back or send in search, and I hope to heaven no one spies them before we return. I suppose the best must be made of a bad job, but don't say a word of this to a soul. It may be all right. I feel sure I can copy the matter from memory."

He lifted his hand and stroked his upper lip as if to suppress a coming grin.

"I'm mighty sorry for you, Chester, but I don't see how it can be helped now. The paper will blow into the bay, like as not, and there 'twill die. You may count on me to say nothing."

He stretched himself and walked away as nonchalantly as if I had not seen through him as easily as I can see through a pane. Well, thought I, there is little fear of your going ahead now, but if you don't desert and go back to Smithtown Bay before sunset, I'm a fish and out of reckoning. For the satisfaction he had tried to conceal was as plain as coarse print, and I knew he had gone from me for fear of showing it.

And, in truth, had he lingered I should have been in danger of betraying myself. I was not a little surprised at my own power as an actor, and the way I had hooked him raised me in my own estimation, but also I realized that the situation was too fine for me to handle alone. To make a confidant of Hawley was more than I dared do, but I quickly determined to explain at least a part of the matter to the only other man whose discretion and intelligence I felt could be trusted. I refer to Cogswell.

He was missing from the group that lay in all attitudes about the small fire, but I found him keep-

WIT AGAINST WIT

ing guard near the rough path that went by the name of the Smithtown Highway. He welcomed me with an expansive smile in which there was all good fellowship, and I approached the business cautiously.

"Do you happen to know a man named Blair, who has lately come to town?" I asked, throwing myself down beside him and pulling out my pipe.

"What manner o' mug is his? I' faith, I thought I knew all New Haven, but I can't place such a name."

"Cover my chin with a black mop and I'll pass for him," I returned.

"Oh, aye. Is it not the chap I saw ye with at the Assembly a few days since? I marked the beard. No, I know naught of him save that he has evidently done his business and gone."

"Gone!" I started upright.

"Aye. What's your pucker? I went down to West Haven Thursday night to say good-by to the governor and mother. I footed it back early yesterday morning and met your friend hot-footed, going west, saddle-packs and all, riding like a lover or one cussed with a bad conscience."

"What time was this?" I asked, my head beginning to whirl, for according to Chandler, Blair had been sick abed at noon.

"Why, after sunup. I know the dew was so heavy I struck the road instead of goin' cross-lots. Must have been about six."

"Riding hard, and with baggage?"

"Full tilt. He didn't look at me, but I knew him. Who is he?"

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"Where did he lodge?" I asked, ignoring the question.

Cogswell turned full about.

"Seems to me, my lad, ye have lots o' curiosity. What's up? Did ye not know he was of the Chandler gang, and lodged with them until Tallmadge came? Then he shifted to the Eagle tavern and——"

"Good God!" I exclaimed, leaping to my feet. "There is something horribly crooked about this! Tallmadge, too! Is it possible? Is it possible?"

I must have been fairly incoherent from excitement and consternation, for before my muddled mind opened a plot that appeared to include the major. I did not stop to consider that great officials would not stoop to making game of a boat-load of rustics; I thought only that as Blair and Chandler were traitors, the major was, by implication, no less. The flight of Blair confirmed my suspicions, for Tallmadge had appointed Chandler to the expedition, and Blair was intimate with both. I do not know exactly what I said or how I spoke, but Cogswell jarred me into sense of my surroundings by catching me by the shoulders and shaking me, as he inquired if I had suddenly gone daft or wanted the county to know of our hiding-place.

At this I sobered somewhat, and then sat down and unbosomed myself. I did this unreservedly, so far as Blair and the expedition was concerned, but minding myself of my promise, I said nothing about my secret instructions beyond the fact that I had a private matter to attend to for the major. From my first meeting with Blair at the Assembly to his final collapse in my room, I traced the days, and almost

WIT AGAINST WIT

the hours, step by step, speaking guardedly the while, for fear of ears being near, while Cogswell listened with an expression of intense concentration, anon nodding violently or venting himself in a subdued oath. When, after recounting the attempted robbery of my coat, I told of my ruse regarding the lost paper, my companion clapped his fists together and said that had been the first gleam of sense I had shown, the second being when I had determined to make him my confidant.

“I see a fine hatching here,” he said. “And now, if ye have done, let’s take a look at the letter.”

I pulled it from my pocket and handed it to him.

“’Tis well conceived,” he remarked, as he turned it over and over, “an’ it has the smell o’ villainy about it. ’Twas meant for no prying eye. I would ha’ thought its look would ha’ made ye suspicion it. I never saw paper folded an’ sealed after this fashion.”

“Well?” said I interrogatively.

“Well,” he returned, “there’s one of two things to be done. Either ye open this, or like a true man carry it to Hawley, who will make no bones about it. If ye do it yerself an’ find it but a mass o’ love talk, ye can know ye are at fault an’ seal it again, but if, as I fear, ye will not be able to follow its meaning, then ye have the weather-gage of a villain—of two of them—and done yer duty. I take it ye know me to be counted on, an’ I advise ye to do it with yer own hands.”

“But the seal will show——”

“Will it?” he interrupted. “Here, ye need but boosting. Hold it till I come back; ’twill be but a

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

moment." And abruptly placing the letter in my hand, he laid his musket across my knees and walked off toward the camp. In ten minutes he was back with an open knife in his hand. Taking the letter from me, he placed the edge of the steel under the wax and by the light smoke that arose I saw his dodge.

"I fear I have drawn the temper of the blade," he said, as he pressed the knife along; "but it matters little if we draw the meaning o' this. Ah! an' here's what's hotter! 'Tis as I thought!" he exclaimed, as the warm blade cleared the outer edge of the seal and the stiff paper sprung half open. He smoothed it out and held it up to me. In place of plain writing there appeared line upon line of figures without a break, figures and nothing else. I was dumfounded.

"Do ye smell aught now?" asked Cogswell. "Is this a thing that would be easy reading if captured—so easy that it must be sunk? Faith, but your friend lacks no nerve! Small wonder that he wanted it delivered before aught was done, an' he had tried to guard against just what has happened. Will ye take it to Hawley now?"

"Will I be a fool? Nay, I will not," I answered promptly. "I am going to get at this, and when I do then is the time to consider further. There is no cipher that can not be read with patience, and if I fail in this I will not deliver it. I have been gulled enough!"

"Faith, yer head is improving, my lad. An' if it is what I think it is ye won't want to deliver it. We'll just take a copy of the thing an' close it while the blade is warm."

WIT AGAINST WIT

I had no paper, but he had a scrap, and sharpening a bullet to something like an edge, he took down the figures as I read them. It is from this transcript that I copy, giving but a part of the matter to show the principle used that it may be seen with what we had to contend.

“ 5.13.4.14.5.19.15.20.8.19.9.23.21.15.25.4.
18.15.23.12.12.9.23.15.20.5.22.9.7.5.20.1.12.15.
15.20.13.1.18.1.5.6.10.14.18.1.23.15.20.4.5.9.18.
20.5.22.1.8.19.9.8.20.20.21.2.12.12.1.14.9.12.21.
6.19.19.5.3.3.21.19.14.5.5.2.5.22.1.8.9.

“ 3.10.”

It began with the numbers 3 and 10, as in an address, and ended with the same numbers, as in a signature. Some of the figures were underscored, and I confess that the regularity of the array dazzled me before I had held my eyes on it for a minute. Nothing could have appeared more meaningless, but beneath this disguise I knew there must lay all-important matter, for not now did I dream of its being a love message.

The task of deciphering it without a key or a clue to one appeared so stupendous that for a moment I felt fairly whipped, but for a moment only. I knew that the weakness of every form of blind writing lay in the repetition of words and letters, and that the combination could be struck by long effort. But time might prove to be a great object, and, as I read off the numbers, I tried to twist them into something resembling sense, but neither head nor tail would come out of the chaos of figures.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

But the benumbing effects of the cipher did not appear to extend to Cogswell, who, to secure accuracy, called back each number as I read it, and when he had jotted down the last one he looked up with a grim smile that betokened anything but discouragement.

"This is no state paper, lad," he said. "Such an one would not be given ye. I fancy it is hurriedly conceived and can be gotten at handily. 'Tis plain that numbers take the places of letters, but whether backward or forward, mixed or otherwise, is for us to find out. We have some seven hours before us, an' we'll lay siege to it in regular approaches. But first, let us close the paper again."

This he did by reheating the blade and melting the under face of the wax, fixing the seal in a manner so skilful that its breaking would not be suspected.

"Did you see Chandler about?" I asked, as he came back.

"Not a hair of him; but then several of the men have strayed into the woods. Now let's get to the bottom of this."

First we laid down the alphabet, numbering each letter. As there were no divisions we knew not where to begin a word, and each trial resulted in nothing but a meaningless array of characters, and over these we bothered for about an hour, Cogswell with his brows drawn into knots as he pored over the mystery, and I with my chin on his shoulder, fairly stumped, yet not ready to give up.

The sun climbed higher and higher and slid over the noon mark. The birds had grown mute, and not a sound broke the silence of the depth of the wood

WIT AGAINST WIT

save now and then the piping of a locust, the whisper of the breeze through the surrounding pines, or an occasional expletive from one of us. Finally my companion said:

“ ’Tis strange that both address an’ signature are the same—10 and 3, or 103. Let’s see the letter again.”

I handed it to him in silence and he studied it, his full lip nipped by his teeth, his hand anon rumpling his hair until it was in wild disorder.

“ The name is Josephine Cowan—J. C.—and, in faith, I have it! ” he suddenly exclaimed, rolling over and over in his excitement. “ Quick, lad! Try this. The C. J. is J. C. Try it as a key. By the Lord! *Every word is spelled backward and the thing should be read from bottom to top!* ”

CHAPTER VII

THE CIPHER

As the truth flashed on me I trembled with eagerness and called back the numbers, reading their value from the alphabet while he put them down. It was as plain as day, the sense coming even as the letters dropped from my lips. I was beside myself to get at the contents, for each word gave growing importance to the document, and when it was finished I was aghast at my narrow escape and more than thankful for the knowledge gained. Had I presented the letter in ignorance of its contents, it would have been like my putting a loaded pistol to my own heart and pulling the trigger. The paper, fully deciphered and corrected, read as follows:

“J. C.:

“Have been successful in all but this. Tried to warn Jones. Fear I am too late. Give to Will, who is of the party, the last news. It will reach me quicker than through O. B. The bearer will be John Chester. I knew him readily by his likeness; so will you. I contrived his being my messenger. He suspects nothing. Do not make him a prisoner of war or allow him to be paroled if captured; that would be useless to us. He is charged with a mission

THE CIPHER

to Annie Kronje *whose identity you must obtain*. Subjugate him as you know how. When you prove him a spy report to Colonel Birch or Simcoe. Either will dispose of him as we desire.

“The coast of the State, save at New London, wide open. N. H., two guns. Fairfield, none. Norwalk, none. Sawpits, valueless. Stonington, valueless. Have ferreted every point. N. H. and Norwalk likeliest. Report to Tryon. My dearest love, am all but penniless. Fortune will brighten when the other work is completed. Does the squire still live? With him and J. C. gone all obstacles are leveled. Am well. Report my condition. I get nothing of importance from Tallmadge but his good graces. Too sharp. With embraces,
J. C.”

“Now is this not a lover’s bleat?” said Cogswell, looking up from the paper, his hand shaking a trifle; “a tender assurance, one which ye might deliver with honor to all parties? Ye have been unwittingly fondling a snake, Chester. Aye, by my soul, ye have been pulled from hell’s pit! Ye must be born for great things! What will ye do now?”

My heart felt as if a strap were about it. My throat was dry. The mind works strangely, but I aver that the sense of relief which came with the knowledge that Tallmadge was not implicated in the matter was as strong as any feeling then possessing me.

Never before had my brain worked faster than at that moment, though it has bettered the speed once since then. For a space I was unable to speak, but even as I strove at it I put the original letter in my

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

pocket, reached for the translation, reread it with an effort at calmness, then tore it into fine bits. There was small danger of forgetting it. Finally I got command of my tongue.

"Keep the copy and show it to Tallmadge when you get back, telling him all. I must stay here. In a measure I am under orders—what, I can not tell you. With a knowledge of this letter I should be more than a born fool if I let a woman get the better of me. I suspect nothing! Do I not? Oh, my faith! my faith! Could I have but two minutes' interview with Blair, he might suspect that I suspected! And now for Chandler. He is the 'Will' of the message; he will bear back word. God 'fend me from killing him outright, for as I am a living man he'll swing for this if Hawley is the one I take him for!"

"Easy, lad, easy," said Cogswell. "Let's get all straight. What's O. B.?"

"Oyster Bay, of course. I heard of a fort there—a stockade. 'Tis near Cold Spring, on the line of the great highway from Huntington to Brooklyn, and from there they send word across the sound. They have their familiars on the other side, small doubt."

"Oh, aye. That is why Chandler would have lured us there. I see, I see. And who is the 'squire'?"

"Squire Emberson, my uncle. Who else? Does he still live? Is he, too, marked by them? I know not, but soon shall—I soon shall! Oh, my God, my God! that I have all but wrecked myself!"

I almost sobbed.

"Nay, lad," said Cogswell, putting his arm about

THE CIPHER

me with the tenderness of a woman; "ye might eall on the Almighty in a different spirit. Who else saved ye from wreck? Come, let's bag the beast Chandler."

But we did not bag him—worse luck. He was not about, neither did he drift into camp that afternoon. When Cogswell was relieved of his watch we hunted the woods for him, though we dared not go far, and when it began to grow dusk and the roll was called Chandler was missing.

"Back to the beach he's gone, small doubt," said Cogswell. "A great pity. I fear yer smartness tripped us that time. But leave him to me; oh, leave him to me. 'Tis he that doesn't suspect now! Will ye tell Hawley?"

I had considered it, and in the face of Chandler's desertion, decided not to inform the captain. It would tend to complicate matters and might reflect on myself. However, I told Cogswell he might enlighten him on the way back, but at present I did not wish to handicap myself by further sharing the secret. I felt vaguely that there was a possibility of my getting information from the lady in question, thus turning the tables on her, whereas, if Hawley took the matter in hand, a mess might be made of it by putting her on guard. I did not care to be a marked man and had no intention of personally participating in the attack, my duty having been done when I had guided the expedition to the house, and in this my friend agreed with me.

As the dusk deepened and Chandler did not make his appearance, he was damned as a coward and we went on without him. I pushed ahead with a feeling of dogged desperation. Whatever softness my dis-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

position had held was nullified by a sense of bitterness that was unwholesome. I recognized that until then I had not looked upon our excursion in the light of pure warfare, but, goaded by the imposition discovered, I did now, and in my unreasoning mood the rankling hatred I held for Blair extended to every one with whom he was in sympathy, most of all to this woman who was apparently equal to carrying out instructions and seeing that I was properly hanged as a spy. Why I should be a menace to Blair while living, even though a prisoner, was beyond my ken. The personal spite shown in the letter was too pointed to be mistaken, and for some undreamed-of reason I was marked for destruction. My uncle and I were obstacles which somehow marred the happiness and plans of the precious couple.

Cogswell, who showed a mixture of indignation and pity, could not help me to an explanation. His feeling was directed more against Chandler than any other actor in the matter, and if curses went for anything, the deserter would have but a short shrift if he fell into the hands of the man who trudged along at my side.

Once upon the southern slope of the ridge that forms the backbone of Long Island, running its entire length, and which is but a great moraine marking the lower limits of the prehistoric ice-field that once covered New England, we went along easily and rapidly. Here the timber was heavy, not yet having been touched by the British wood-cutters, and through it we struck, having left the road because the going would be safer and we could travel in a straighter line. By half past nine we were on the level and fer-

THE CIPHER

tile land that marks the eastern limits of the great Hempstead plains, and without a halt we rapidly covered the open spaces.

The night, like those of the past week, was perfect. The moon, now in her full glory, lit up the land with an effulgence that made it dangerous for us to remain in the clearings. The shadows were sharp and black, the air was filled with a myriad of fine sounds from swamp and woodland. Peace reigned supreme. The earth, steeped in a heavy dew, sent up its fragrant breath. The wind blew fair from the south, singing gently in the ear, and brought with its briny tang a strong hint of the nearness of the ocean.

Notwithstanding that my nerves were becoming set as we approached the house, I failed not to recognize the beauty of the night and that sense of flat openness which is peculiar to the south shore of Long Island. The distance obtruded itself; nothing seemed real save the immediate surroundings.

It was near ten—later, I fancy—when I called a halt on the edge of a swamp which I knew as I knew my own face. Not a mile from where we stood was the house we were to attack, though it was hidden from view by the growth of white birch, pine, and dwarf oak that covered the morass, and extreme caution became necessary. Forming in close Indian file, we broke through the low growth that skirts the swamp until the orchard lay before us, each tree, clear of underbrush, throwing its black shadow, like a silhouette, on the short grass. The mansion lay glimmering in the moonlight, touched at one end by the shadow of the trees. A light was burning in the library, the windows of which were wide open.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"It looks like a palace," whispered Hawley. And it did, its white, shingle-covered sides having a marble gleam in the mystic light.

From this point the men were directed to surround the house, and with Hawley at my heels, I cautiously made a half circuit of the building, crossed the gravelled driveway, and stole to the front.

As we passed the end of the house I heard the music of a harpsichord, and then clear on the air broke a song from within, a song so sweet and yet withal so strong, so deep-throated, so glorious, that we both halted and listened. The voice was superb, the voice of a woman, and its velvety fulness spread out into the quiet night without an echo to mar it.

There was no joyous rollicking to the words, no tinkling rhythm, but a great, harmonious wail. It was full of power that rose and fell like the throbbing of the heart of the ocean after a storm. I had never heard its like. Beset as I was by a host of thronging emotions, I did not lose a note. I saw the lift of water far out; I marked its swelling increase and gathering speed, and then it broke in a thundering crash of melody and its scattered spume was the tinkle of the instrument played in accompaniment. It was a sea song full of the wildness, the gushing, the beauty of the sea, and was sung by no weakling. Billow upon billow came the harmony, the soul of the singer behind it, and I stood there drinking it in until Hawley pulled me by the arm and motioned me ahead of him.

I felt like a thief as I stole up the veranda steps and looked into the hall. On either side of the door was a broad window, the solid wooden shutters of

THE CIPHER

which were flung back, the sash of one being open. The interior was perfectly familiar. The hall, extending well-nigh two-thirds the width of the house, was less a hall than a great parlor. On a table in its center burned a whale-oil lamp. Over the door opposite was a pair of immense antlers which had been given to the judge some years before by Sir William Johnson. On an easel stood a royal commission in a handsome frame, and along the walls, which were covered with oil-paintings, were various articles of massive furniture. The polished floor gleamed under the soft light of the lamp and an air of extreme refinement rested on the whole interior. It was the peaceful home of a wealthy aristocrat.*

But my eye swept over these well-known details, for my interest lay not in them. Had the room been otherwise barren it would have appeared fully furnished by the company assembled within, and it was at once apparent that we had stumbled on no ordinary family gathering. At the harpsichord, with his back to us, sat a young gentleman dressed in the height of fashion, a sword poking out the skirt of his velvet coat. His hands ran easily over the ivory keys, and his face was turned upward to the magnificent creature that stood by his side pouring forth the song we heard. She was tall, and in full court dress, her powdered hair towering above a countenance that would be striking in any costume. With one hand resting on her half-bared bosom and her dark, black-browed eyes lifted, as if her soul followed the music, she

* The Jones house still stands. The parlor as described has remained unaltered in effect for upward of one hundred and fifty years.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

was a glorious sight. Her gown rippled to her feet, a mass of richly colored silk softened by lace. Her arms were bared; from the top of her low-cut corsage sparkled a brooch of diamonds, and her full, round throat was circled by a band of jewels. By the table, with his lace-cuffed hand resting easily on its polished surface, sat Judge Jones, always self-conscious in his dreamiest moments, always complacent, always punctilious in manner and dress. His eyes were fixed on the singer, and near him, slightly in the shadow, was a young lady richly costumed, her unpowdered hair showing a red brown in the subdued light. Her head being bent, as if her attention was fixed on the point of the little blue satin slipper that peeped from beneath her skirt, I could make nothing of her face save that her chin was round and her small nose cut to perfection. Diamonds blazed in her ears and her hand waved a huge feather fan slowly and in measure to the music. Under her own portrait, which hung on the wall, sat the judge's wife, a stiff lace cap topping her severe head. Plain in color and heavy in richness, her dress broke in crisp folds about her. She was a patrician, from her firm mouth and cold eye to the hem of her uncompromising costume; her very pose bespoke her disposition. An elderly gentleman in powdered wig, satin small-clothes, silk stockings, and dress sword, sat on the sofa removed from the light, and it was evident that, from the worshiping accompanist to the turbaned slave I could just make out in the shadow of the passage, every eye hung on the singer, who posed like a goddess before them.

Even I prostrated myself and stood spellbound by the witchery of her voice and the imperious beauty of

THE CIPHER

her person. Bewildered and carried away by the music, for the moment the purpose of my mission was lost, and the expedition might have miscarried had not Hawley whispered in my ear and asked me which was the judge.

"There is your man at the table," I said without turning my head. "His wife is opposite; I know none of the rest."

At that moment the singer lowered her gaze and her eyes met mine, for my face was well-nigh against the pane. Both hands went to her bosom as she abruptly stopped the song, turning her last note into half a shriek; then she stiffened herself and pointed at the window, her face taking on an expression of surprise and wonder, though I marked nothing resembling fear.

In an instant the character of the scene changed. There came a pause, then a general turning of heads. The young man at the harpsichord swung around on his stool and appeared to be the first one to scent the true nature of the interruption, for he jumped to his feet and drew his slender rapier. As if the act had been a signal, Hawley lifted the heavy bronze knocker and brought it down with a thundering rap. I heard his cutlass whip from its scabbard, then he put a whistle to his lips and blew a blast that struck through my ears like a knife. There came a rushing of feet on the gravel drive and up the broad steps, a splintering of glass and crashing of wood mingling with the shrieks of women and shouting of men, and as the heavy door swung on its hinges, either forced or opened from within, I nimbly disengaged myself from the press and ran down the steps.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

The men surged into the house, and in a moment more the judge, his wig awry, his laces torn, was dragged to the level lawn before the door. He was soon followed by Cogswell, who appeared with the accompanist, the latter flaming with passion, and that he had resisted arrest was plain from the hilt of the sword he still carried in his hand, the blade having been broken short off. Within all was hurry and confusion, even after the slight opposition offered had ceased, and in the brief time that had elapsed I saw lights moving through the rooms above and by the shouts and crashing of furniture was made aware that the majority of the band had dispersed through the mansion.

Hawley, who had come out with the judge, started back with Cogswell, leaving the prisoners in charge of four or five men. Not caring to be marked, I hung in the shadow of a tree, and as the two passed me I heard the captain say:

“The devils are looting the house, despite orders, and nothing can stop them. Look you to the man who lies stunned. If he is of consequence, bring him along if you can; I must search the judge’s desk.”

As they disappeared, somewhat sick at heart, I turned and walked to the road, which stretched far away on either hand, a straight white streak in the moonlight. As I looked east and along the way I hoped soon to be traveling, plainly on my ear came the sound of galloping horses, the hoof beats rattling on the hard clay as clearly as the beating of a distant drum. In a flash I caught the portent, and turning, ran to the house. As I passed the group on the lawn I shouted:

THE CIPHER

“Hurry off your men; there is a rescue coming!” and ran on into the hall.

By the lamp that was still burning I marked the wreck of the room. On the floor sat Cogswell supporting the overdressed old gentleman, who was evidently recovering from the effects of a blow, for his now wigless head shone in the light like a pink billiard-ball and down his temple ran a thin stream of blood. No one else was in sight.

“Off with you!” I shouted to Cogswell. “A rescue! a rescue!” And I tore into the passage to the stairs leading above.

On the alarm there was a sudden rushing of men from the upper rooms, and I ascended the steps two at a time in haste to find the captain. The thieves, some empty-handed, others laden with various articles, passed down like a whirlwind, one fellow, with his arms filled with loot, missing his footing and falling from top to bottom, where he lay still on the floor below. Seeing nothing of Hawley and fearing capture, I was about to follow the others when I heard a piercing cry from behind a closed door at the end of the hall, and running thereto I threw it open.

In the center of the apartment a brawny villain bent over a crouched woman, tearing the jewels from her ears, and above him stood the singer crying for help as she strove to drag him away, while shriek after shriek broke from his victim. In evident ignorance of my presence, the man turned and struck at the standing girl. As she saw me she uttered a “Thank God!” and stretched her arms toward me, but having no mind or time for aught but hurried action, I ran past her, and catching the ruffian by the

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

collar, with my clenched fist I struck him on the temple with all my force. He fell like a bullock. The cowering girl, freed from her assailant, lifted her eyes to mine, but before I could notice more than that they opened wide with a wondering look, I ran from the room.

The house above and below was already free from active enemies. Save for the man who had fallen down-stairs and still lay at their foot, I saw no one until I came into the great hall. The old gentleman, with his wig on sidewise, the queue over his left ear, sat alone on the sofa looking about him in a dazed fashion, his toothless mouth open, his hand pressed to his head. As I cleared from the house I saw the lawn was bare of prisoners and men, but I caught the figures of a group of horsemen lunging into the driveway at full speed. Over the railing I jumped, and unchallenged, doubled about the west wing of the building and got into the road. Without feeling the handicap of my lame ankle, like a deer I sped eastward, with my mind more on what lay in the rear than aught else, and before I was aware of danger I was confronted by two cavalymen who came out from the shadow of a tree as though they had risen from the ground, and by the scarlet on their backs I knew I was a prisoner in the hands of the British.

CHAPTER VIII

RESCUED BY THE DEVIL

THE sudden change to my soaring fortunes mightily affected my conceit, as may well be supposed. The transition from freedom to captivity was so quick that it was difficult to realize, but I pulled myself together and protested at the enforced stoppage, though it was like arguing with men deaf and dumb, as I quickly discovered that my captors were Hessians and without a knowledge of English, and in the jargon that passed betwixt them I gathered as little from them as they from me. It sufficed me to know that I had been fairly caught, and well-nigh red-handed. What would come of it remained to be seen.

As I walked back between my captors I noticed they were not regular cavalrymen, as I had at first supposed. Their high-fronted shakos belied that line of the service as plainly as did their muskets and lack of sabers. Their mounts, too, were without trappings and looked to be but farm horses, and sorry beasts, at that, one being dead lame and the other so gone to bones that its appearance was pitiful, while both were covered with a lather that bespoke hard riding. So far as the animals were concerned I might have made a break for liberty with fair chances of success, but though the brutes were slow, a bullet would be

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

swift, and I saw the futility of the attempt, for the light was bright and there was no cover at hand.

When brought before the house I was chagrined to see the whole force against us was but eight men, a detachment hurried from some quarter, and one which might have easily been disposed of had we stood our ground.

There was much jabbering in German between them, and it soon came to light that the band was commanded by no officer, and was at a loss what to do with the prisoners taken, for besides myself there was the man who had fallen down-stairs, another caught hiding in a closet, and the fellow I had knocked over. The latter showed no resentment as I was brought into the little group, probably from the fact that he had no idea who had been his assailant.

To me it was a mighty inglorious ending of the day, my lowered pride being in no wise perked by the company in which I found myself, for it looked to be the off-scouring of society—men fitted for adventure by brute strength alone, and who had sacrificed themselves on the altar of greed. My condition was made the more aggravating by the fact that within three miles of me lay my uncle's house, the home I longed for, and that it was impolitic, if not impossible, for me to send him information of my state. The one grain of comfort to be sifted from the mass of misfortune was that in the main the expedition had been successful, and if it was not further molested would return with two prisoners instead of one.

As I stood with the others, at that time more humiliated than fearful, I wondered how this interruption could have occurred, but I soon hit upon a

RESCUED BY THE DEVIL

plausible explanation, and one in which I saw the name of Chandler written broad. If he had not swerved to Smithtown on his way back to the beach, and hit upon a British detachment lying therein, then I was far out of reckoning. A hurried gathering of nondescript animals and a hard ride would account for the irregularity of the squad which had taken us, but the non-attendance of an officer was a matter that puzzled me until I considered that perhaps a greater force had gone to intercept Hawley on his return to the boat. That I was wrong in the latter conjecture is a matter of congratulation, for Hawley suffered no interruption or further loss—a fact that does not redound to the credit of the heads of either Chandler or those with whom he communicated.

I saw none of the regular inmates of the house again that night. Within an hour we were taken along the road westward and lodged in a two-story stone building that stood removed from the highway and about a quarter of a mile from the mansion. I knew it well. It was one of the most ancient on the island, and had once been the home of the judge's father, who built Tryon Hall for his son. It was now abandoned, standing in a flat and barren field, a deep but narrow inlet from the bay, struggling through rank marsh grass and slimy mud banks, coming close to the building. The house had an unsavory name as once having been a headquarters for "south sea traders," more broadly named pirates. I had heard stories of boat-loads of rich stuffs brought by night up the inlet to the door and stored away in the roomy garret; vague whispers of divided booty, of orgies, and of violence had spread the country about. Even

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

the reputation of the old gentleman had suffered in this connection, but as his bones had for years been moldering in a lonely grave down by the bayside, and as he had treated his neighbors decently and left many a broad acre to his more aristocratic son, no finger was pointed directly at him and time had sweetened his memory.

Save as a receptacle for farm refuse the interior of the house was now bare. The cold gloom of the immense lower room struck a shudder through me as I was pushed through the door and felt the quaking floor under my feet. In a moment we were fastened in. The windows having long since been boarded up, not a ray of light penetrated the black interior. There was a smell of rats and low-tide mud and decayed salt grass intermingling, and for the first time I felt a sense of comfort in the companionship of the very fellow who, an hour before, I despised.*

I felt my way to the stairs and started up, but the loud snap of a support and the sudden sagging of the structure warned me of its rotten condition, and I gave over the attempt. We gathered in a group, seating ourselves on the floor, but the little animation we at first showed soon died and silence took its place.

In this fashion I waited for the Sabbath to break, wondering what it would bring forth, and wondering more why we had not been taken to some recognized cantonment of the British army instead of being housed in this worse than vault. But I wondered in vain. I had enough else to think of: the cipher letter

* The old Jones house, which had a reputation of being haunted, was demolished in 1838.

RESCUED BY THE DEVIL

burning in my pocket and the identity of the two girls I had seen in the hall. Which was Josephine Cowan? and was it possible that nature had cursed either with a spirit that could deliberately lure an unknown man, though an enemy, to the gallows? It was inconceivable. I had two minds to destroy the letter, but withheld, not because I dreamed of delivering it, but for the reason that I might live to meet Blair and it would be a glorious thing to shake it in his face, repeat the contents, and back him into a corner where things would happen. It occurred to me that I might be searched, and so lose it, but that chance had to be taken; I left it loose in my pocket.

The night went and the next day dawned and faded, and that, too, without a morsel to eat or a draft of water—in fact, without the door having been opened, though that we were well guarded was plain from the footsteps and voices we heard. As the cracks between the boards grew dim in the declining light I became equal to any desperate venture, and some plan of escape might have been hit upon and perhaps attempted, but just as the last of the light died I heard the regular tramp of men, the jingling of arms, and a command in English, and a few minutes later the door was opened, and an officer in full uniform, bearing a pierced tin lantern, entered the room, followed by two women and a number of soldiers.

Weak, hungry, and parched from thirst, I sat on the bottom step of the rickety stairway without moving. The light, held aloft, threw a myriad of luminous punctures over the bare walls, and in the quivering radiance I recognized the singer, tall, imperious,

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

and impatient of countenance, her hair, still showing traces of powder, coiled loosely on top of her beautiful head, her dress, though plain, in keeping with her commanding figure. The second woman was evidently a slave in attendance, for her black face, topped with a gay turban, was indistinguishable in the semi-darkness.

"It is an unpleasant duty, but one that will not detain you, madam," said the officer. "It will simplify my report and save much delay in disposing of these fellows if you can identify them. Did you see this man?" he asked, lowering the light to the face of the chap I had felled.

"Most certainly, sir," she replied in a full, rich tone that was music in itself. "He was the one who assaulted Miss Romaine. He was robbing her when——"

"Never mind, so the villain was one of them. —Step off, sir."

A soldier walked up to the prisoner and led him to the wall.

"And this one?"

"He was also there, as was the one by his side," said the lady, drawing back her lifted skirt in disgust as the two walked past her.

"Good! Where is the fourth?"

I stood up.

"Ah! here's a fellow of a different stripe!" he exclaimed, flashing the light in my face. "Was this man of them?"

I heard something that might have been a low cry of surprise, but the gleam of the candle in my eyes blotted out all but itself.

RESCUED BY THE DEVIL

"He—he was there—but—but he was not of the assaulting party, sir. It was he who saved Miss Romaine when the ruffian I identified tried to rob her.—James, why are you here?"

The question came like a gasp.

The officer lowered the lantern and I saw the girl standing as I had seen her the night before, one hand on her heart, the other pointing at me. Her eyes flashed as the dots of radiance danced over her face.

Up to then I had no other idea than that I would be dragged off with the rest. The sudden interruption to the smoothness of the proceedings was as un-hoped for as its cause was for a moment unguessed, though had I not been brought low through starvation and thirst I might have caught at the cue before I did. Time was mercifully given me, however, and by the man I had knocked down, for as he heard the words he started forward and would have leaped on me had it not been for the soldier who interposed himself between us.

"All hell!" he shouted, as he struggled with the guard. "An' had I known ye for the traitor ye are I'd 'a' had the black heart out o' ye this day! 'Twas ye, was it, that brought me to this coil? An' to think, damn ye, that ye have been under my hands for hours an' I not know! Look at him, lads! look at him!"

He shook his immense fist at me and strained in the embrace of the man who held him. In his violence he might have broken away had not a soldier struck him across the bowels with the butt of his musket and the man doubled up with a groan.

"Who are you, sir? and what were you doing

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

among the others?" asked the officer, apparently oblivious to the rough treatment of his prisoner.

"For the first," I returned, "I will not answer. For the second, I was doing my duty. I was there, yes, but took no hand in the assault. I came as the bearer of a message to Miss Josephine Cowan."

While speaking I kept my eyes fixed on the lady. The open wonder she had at first shown changed to an expression of doubt, as if she were deeply puzzled. The only sign of emotion she had displayed was in her exclamation of surprise, and now her black brows were knitted and her full lip slightly curled as she looked at me. Suddenly her face turned to flint and her lids came together as though she was looking into a strong light, a flash of a smile displayed the edge of her teeth, then her lips drew across them and closed, thin and firm as iron. She was a tigress. As I mentioned my errand she drew herself up.

"If you have a message, sir, you may deliver it to me. I am Josephine Cowan."

As I marked the change in her I could have sworn to her identity. Beauty lay on her like a mask, for with the knowledge I was not the man for whom she had taken me, it dissolved and left a grinning skull behind.

I never saw such a metamorphosis in a human being as took place in the few seconds we confronted each other, and even then the devil came into and passed out of her countenance within the time it takes to count ten.

I knew there was no mercy in this woman. I felt she was a fitting tool for desperation in almost

RESCUED BY THE DEVIL

any form and realized there would be no child's play in attempting to thwart her in aught she undertook. She had the head of Medusa, lacking its serpents, and could be as cruel as hell; and yet last night I had been ready to worship her.

I held the letter toward the officer. He snatched it from me, turned it over and conned the superscription.

"Have you other papers?"

"None whatever, sir."

Without considering my answer, he took a step forward and plunged his hand in my pocket. I was within an ace of knocking him down, but instead thanked God I had left my uncle's letters behind. They would have damned us both outright.

"You may have to pay heavily for this insult, sir," I said, my course now lying clear before me. He sneered in my face without answering and passed the letter to the lady, whose features had fallen into what may have been their habitual repose. She swept open the paper without inspecting its seal and glanced at the contents. Many such a cipher must have passed betwixt the writer and reader, for without a key she apparently read the contents, drawing toward the light which the officer respectfully held open for her.

It was a picture worthy of reproduction. Diana clothed in modern garb bending over a paper, her lips moving as she spelled out its contents, the glow of the candle showing the rich red of her rounded cheek, the dustiness of her black hair, and her perfect profile. The young officer resting on his sword, holding the light which shot needle gleams through the darkness behind it and brought out spots of crimson on the

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

man's brilliant coat as if he bled through a dozen wounds. The bright turban and the ebony face of the negress in waiting and, in the shadow beyond, the subdued red of the uniforms of the guard and the dusky shapes of the prisoners. For a background the cob-webbed rafters just touched by the reflection, the broken walls and the heavy door with its pendant bar barely visible through the haze. I can close my eyes and see it all and wish for the power of a painter.

I knew my fate hung on the mood of the woman or the respect she felt for the writer of the letter. I stood waiting in silence, and save for a shifting of feet on the loose floor, silence was all about us. She read slowly, once in a while lifting her eyes as if to absorb the matter given, then reverting to the sheet. I felt as if she were taking an hour. Suddenly she closed the document and turned to me with a smile that might have deceived the father of lies.

"Oh, sir," she exclaimed, her face alight, her air as bewitching as it was bewildering, "how can I thank you for taking this risk? How did you dare?"

She swept past the officer like a queen and held out a hand soft and warm as only a full-blooded woman's hand can be. I took it like the unsuspecting ass I posed as.

"I conceive there was little to dare," I returned easily, my spirits rising as I looked into the face of this woman and crossed swords with her.

"Ah! but if this had fallen—if this had been opened by others it might have gone hard with you, sir; the contents would have been your ruin."

"Then should I have trembled before I met you,

RESCUED BY THE DEVIL

madam," I answered, bowing. "Permit me to read and judge."

She laughed a low, delicious, full-throated laugh as if immensely pleased at the compliment.

"Oh, no; not yet. And you know Mr. Blair? A dear friend of mine. You did this for him?"

"We have not been friends for long, madam. He has done me a service. I think I know him," I returned, careful that the irony of my words was well hidden.

"He speaks well of you, sir. You, too, must be a friend of mine, Mr. Chester. I know your poor uncle well. I owe you much for this."

"I fear the obligation is on my side, madam. I owe Blair much for this."

"Your tongue is well tuned, sir."

She laughed lightly and turned to the officer with an imperious swing to her body.

"This gentleman is above suspicion. He is Squire Emberson's nephew, and the squire holds a cartel of safety. He is a loyal subject. He had nothing to do with the abduction of Judge Jones and Mr. Willett, coming only as a secret agent to me. It was a coincidence. Do you understand me, sir? You may leave him in my charge. So tell Colonel De Lancey. I will be responsible. If you see General Tryon tell him I wish to see him at once. Take away these vermin."

There was no air of asking a favor in this. Had the woman been a queen giving her orders she could not have appeared more absolute. There was no room for argument, nor yet was there a lack of femininity in her manner. It was simply the will of one

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

used to being obeyed; it was imperious beauty bolstered by self-consciousness—a power before which strong men prostrate themselves and for it sometimes commit crime.

“General Tryon has returned to York,” answered the officer, bowing. “I am aware that Miss Cowan has the confidence of my superiors, and I will leave the prisoner if she wishes it.”

“I do more than wish it. I demand it.”

“Very good, madam. Then I will put him on parole and——”

“I will not be placed on parole, sir,” I interrupted quickly. “I have been treated shamefully, having been left to starve and thirst for four and twenty hours without a chance to explain. Then you chose to insult me. You may take me or leave me as you please, but I am either a prisoner of war or a free man.”

It was a desperate throw, for I knew that a parole would render me absolutely useless to the cause, though it would give me freedom, but reckoning on my knowledge of the contents of the letter, I conceived that my enemy would be my best ally.

And in this I was not disappointed. The lady faced me in surprise, then turned on the officer.

“Is this thing possible, sir? Have you and your men no consideration that prisoners are treated like cattle? Was starvation in your orders?”

“You are unjust, Miss Cowan,” was the humble reply. “I knew naught of this. The squad that took them were German troops sent hurriedly from Smithtown as soon as news was received of the intended raid. They are but a haymaker’s guard and without

RESCUED BY THE DEVIL

authority, as their officer was thrown from his horse and badly injured. They are poor riders. I was sent from Oyster Bay to take charge of the prisoners and bring them in. I presumed they had been fed, at least."

"Your presumption is large, sir. See that these men have food at once. You may leave this gentleman with me, and can rest assured that I will account for him. Report the fact to Colonel De Lancey, and say it is my wish—my wish, sir." She turned about to me. "Will you yield yourself a prisoner of mine, Mr. Chester?"

I bowed low.

"I am your prisoner without terms, madam."

"That is trite, sir. I hear it often. Will you give me your word?"

"I will give you my word that I am desperately thirsty," I answered.

"You must be, and starved as well.—Momey, run and get something on the table."

She swept the negress ahead with a motion of her hand and went out, I following her from the house and wondering if the weak-kneed officer would dare stiffen himself at the last moment. There were a dozen soldiers drawn up in the road, but they offered no molestation. Side by side we walked in silence for a dozen rods or more, and when beyond earshot of those we had left the lady began to laugh, low at first, then clearer and more unrestrainedly—a laugh so rich, so hearty, so melodious in its pure femininity, so rollicking, so brim full of life that was contagious, that weak as I was, I joined in it from an irresistible impulse, although I knew she was laughing at me and

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

what she thought her easy conquest. But there was a witchery about her, nevertheless. The quick indrawing of breath, the heaving of her full bosom, the gleam of her white teeth through the dusk, for the moon had not yet risen—all these roused the animal in me even while I was perfectly aware that the girl hated me. I wondered little at the blind infatuation of the officer, and might have gone daft myself only I had seen the skull. To war with this Borgia would be worth the while. Even if I fell there would be tonic in the fight, and had I not known her, how easy would have been her victory! But what living man could subjugate her?

CHAPTER IX

THE TEMPTRESS

SUDDENLY she stopped and confronted me on the white road, laying her hand on my arm in a way that made my body tingle. Her face grew serious in an instant, her voice low and vibrant.

"Mr. Chester, for all that I laugh, it is no matter of mirth; I might have fainted without that reaction. There are some questions you wish to ask me."

"There are many, but I am unable to formulate them now," I answered, sparring for time.

"Many, yes; but you will wish to know why I saved you from parole. Well, because this letter informed me that you had a secret mission—a mission for the cause we both love; a parole would have strangled you."

I nodded.

"Another reason is because you are your uncle's nephew. I am in your hands now," she continued. "Do you see what I have done? God makes a fool once in a while—a fool like yonder officer—and dresses him up as a man and gives him authority, but for every fool he creates he also makes a woman who will undo him. Had I not received that letter you would have gone—to a prison ship, probably; but it commanded me to act in your behalf—to act, and am

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

I not an actress? Aye, I live a lie—for a purpose. Tryon swears by me. Simcoe would desert at my word, and I would give it, only I find him useful where he is. God knows I wish I could have saved your men, but the risk was too great and they are ruffians at best who would rob both friend and foe.”

I nodded again.

“Now, my friend, for you are my friend,” she continued, “you must be guided by me. You must pose as a royalist—from anywhere you please, only be a royalist. I have saved your poor uncle from arrest, and his property from confiscation. He is the only true man hereabouts and I would save you. Do you understand me, or must I state clearly that I am not what I seem?”

I met the issue fairly, sudden as it was.

“Madam, I must know it. I am not blind. I am more than fortunate in your friendship. Pray God that I am worthy of the spirit you have shown and do not become too great a fool to command your respect.” I lifted her hand from my sleeve and touched it with my lips. “You spoke of my uncle as ‘poor.’ Is he in distress?”

She showed no resentment at my salute, but her dark eyes searched my face with childlike innocence—the innocence of a maiden who fears flippancy. I could have smitten her across her beautiful lying mouth.

“Your uncle is sick,” she said, as she took my arm and walked on. “Sorely sick, my friend. I am worried—so worried about the old gentleman that scarce a day passes without my visiting him. Your aunt means well, but she is incapable.”

THE TEMPTRESS

“My aunt!” I exclaimed.

“Your Aunt Cornelia. Oh, do you not know? Have you not heard? She is with him. We have had a doctor from the post at Oyster Bay, but there seems nothing to be done. Your uncle is failing. It is a fortunate circumstance, your coming, and fortunate that I am here instead of in New York.”

I had absolutely nothing to say in return. My uncle sick and dying! God in heaven! I had received no blow like this. I felt a horrible loneliness, a quick realization of the power arrayed against me. Was my uncle their victim? Was he being “removed”? The wide landscape swung wildly for an instant, and I must have staggered, but the girl’s soft hand steadied me, drawing my arm close to her.

“You are faint!” she said.

“Weak from lack of food, perhaps; but I must get on.”

I would have gone straight forward to my house, only she insisted that I should first eat, and I acquiesced, knowing the need of food and the wisdom of her advice.

The horse having been stolen, the stable was now well guarded, for two soldiers were walking up and down the graveled walk before the house. The interior appeared deserted, but Miss Cowan explained that Mrs. Jones had been prostrated by the shock of the assault, though she had no fear for her husband’s life, and Miss Romaine had returned to the city with Governor Robinson, who had been slightly hurt in the fray.

“Ah,” she said, “your men missed a great chance there!”

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

Governor Robinson! The start I gave was apparently unnoticed. The British general and royal Governor of New York had been in Hawley's grasp, and my ill-advised alarm had lost him a prize worth twenty such as Judge Jones. I was too chagrined to make a return beyond expressing a hope that Miss Romaine had escaped injury.

As I ate the food spread before me the radiant woman sat opposite, looking at every mouthful I took. She dismissed the slave and waited on me herself, as if I were her lover, but she asked few questions. With a recklessness born of wisdom I told my hostess of the expedition and its object, even to the desertion of Chandler, though not of the cause of his defection. I drank her health in the red wine before me, at which she bowed her stately head and smiled. I hoped she would, in some way, show curiosity anent Annie Kronje, but never a word did she drop on that subject. Verily, I thought, the woman looks for me to hang myself without effort on her part. When I finished my story she brushed her hand across her eyes and abruptly changed the subject.

"You are strangely like Mr. Blair in feature. Do you know I mistook you for him last night?"

"I have remarked the likeness myself, but can not account for it," I answered. "What is his rank in the American army? I confess I am ignorant of it."

"Is it possible?" she asked, opening her eyes wide in well-assumed wonder. "Are you not his friend? You might have gathered that much from the letter, at least."

"Only a friend in a general way, madam. As for the letter, I did not read it. I was not curious,"

THE TEMPTRESS

I returned, rising. "However, I understand that Mr. Blair is open to congratulations—that much he allowed me to infer."

A flush passed over her face like a flash of summer lightning. She laughed lightly, but showed no embarrassment.

"He takes too much for granted. But this is not a matter for discussion for the present."

She arose, swept her gown behind her, and stood tall and magnificent.

"I think he is working under direct orders from Mr.—from General Washington; but I am not sure. I have not seen him for months; but we correspond, as you are aware. I will bid you good night, my friend; I know your haste. Shall I see you to-morrow?"

"I think not," I answered promptly.

"I think so," she returned, smiling. "I must make my visit as usual."

She held out her hand and looked at me appealingly, a look that would have intoxicated me had I not been armed. I dared not linger for fear that along with the wine I had drunk the devil would get into my blood. I brought her pink fingers to my lips, and in a moment more was striding along the deserted road toward my home.

CHAPTER X

A DISCOVERY

I WISH the exigencies of my story would permit my omitting this coming chapter of my life, but it must be told. As I prepare to set it down I am conscious of my mental recoil, for in doing it I must relive a period so sown with surprise and horror that years have not softened its aspect. Thus it is worse than the sorrow of death or danger, for time is kind to the sufferer from these.

I am aware that the history of this fair island has unfolded crimes the recital of which now shocks humanity—crimes as great as any I record—but I have to do with an act of moral turpitude so cold-blooded, so inexcusable, so ingenious, that it towers above everything in my experience. It was born of the devil and ended in a combat 'twixt love and hate. Which won? Which always wins when these two fight?

Therefore, as I must needs, I place events as they came, and my memory retains every detail, for each burned deeply. Refreshed by food and stimulated by what I had drunk, I passed rapidly along the road. There was no bridge over the broad inlet (which, with one near my late prison, makes the land a neck), the highway running around its head. It was late when

A DISCOVERY

I caught sight of my home, and my steps quickened, for a great flood of emotion came upon me as I saw the house to which I had been a stranger for nearly four years. There was but one light in it, and that from the window of the room my uncle called his study, though it was half workroom, half library.

The house faces south, and betwixt it and the road passing its rear was a garden that had always been the old gentleman's pride. When I reached this I slowed my pace. Though there was a wealth of bush and blossom and the scent of flowers hung heavy on the still night air, I noticed a lack of thrift, or rather was it as if nature, undirected, had taken matters in her own hand and in her own wild way? The untrimmed creeping phlox spread beyond its proper limits in ragged white masses that looked like snow-banks in the clear moonlight. Portulacas had strayed into the path, hollyhocks had sprung up in disorderly array, their tall stalks and starry blossoms sentinels over a mass of unrestricted growth. The walk was rain-guttered and the whole air of the beautiful spot was one of neglect. It had become a jungle of shrubbery.

For all that I was home-going my heart was not light, and clearly I marked the confusion of the garden. I did not follow the path around to the front door, but took to the long, untrimmed grass near the house, skirted the negro quarters, and getting beneath the lighted window, raised myself on the rough foundations of the building and looked in.

The room was no longer a workroom, for the old bench was gone, and in its place stood a bed. The half-emptied shelves and the general pushed-back ap-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

pearance of the usual furniture told me the apartment had been turned into a makeshift bedroom, aye, even a sick-room. Upon the bed I knew my uncle was lying, for though I could not see him, I heard the deep snoring of the sleeping man, and the sound came to me like familiar music. On a table by the bedside stood a candle, a bottle of wine, and some glasses, and by the table was a strange woman whom I knew as my aunt as instinctively as I knew the patient was her brother. She was a little woman, flat bosomed and painfully thin, with iron-gray hair in two sausage-shaped rolls before her ears, and a scant knob on her head which was topped by an enormous tortoise-shell comb. Her eyes were black, her face pale and wizened, and in keeping with her slight body. Her nose was thin and prominent, and altogether she did not please me, for though she looked like my uncle there was nothing alike in the appearance of either. This paradoxical statement is true; my aunt was but a caricature of her brother. Her silk skirt, which overdressed her, shone in the candle-light, and her claw-like fingers were covered with rings. She was pouring something from a vial into a glass. It was evidently the last of the medicine, for the bottle was turned upside down and so held that the last drops might be collected, this wait giving me time to gather the foregoing details. Half filling the glass with wine, she placed her hand beneath the pillow, and with wonderful strength for one so slight, lifted my uncle's head that he might drink.

As his face came to the level of my gaze I was shocked. It was the squire, but in the half-open eyes,

A DISCOVERY

the ghastly whiteness of the countenance, and the fallen jaw, I barely knew him. So startled was I at the sight that my foot slipped from the projection on which I rested, and I went to the ground with something of a thump. I heard a slight exclamation from within, but now anxious to get nearer, I ran around the house to the front door and entered the hall. Instead of the usual lamp burning on the table, all was black darkness. I knew my whereabouts, however, and was feeling my way to the study when the lady came out, bearing the candle, and in such haste that the flame flared backward in a trail of smoke. As she saw me she halted abruptly and gave a low thin cry of "O James!" and placing the light on the floor, ran to me and threw herself in my arms.

I received the bony embrace and marked the meager lips held up for a kiss, and then I disengaged myself and stepped back.

"I presume you are my respected Aunt Cornelia, madam," I said, though the fact that I had been called "James" for the second time that night did not escape me.

At this the lady let out a half shriek and stood transfixed with arms stretched wide and fingers all apart like spokes in a rimless wheel. And thus we stood facing each other for the space of half a minute, or until betwixt impatience and a growing fear of something, I knew not what, I broke the spell.

"You do not know me, madam. I owe you an apology for my sudden intrusion. I am John Chester."

"O Lord, sir!" she said faintly. "How did

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

you come here? I thought—I thought you were James! ”

“ And who is James? ” I asked, as she sank into a chair and placed her jeweled hand over her heart while I picked up the candle.

“ Do ye not know James? ” she demanded sharply, as she recovered herself. “ He is my son—your own cousin. He said he would see you.”

I set the light on the table, and from very weakness dropped on to the great settle by the door. That children and fools speak the truth was clearly in evidence here, and one of the latter had suddenly and unwittingly pulled the veil from my eyes. It was like waking into a sudden glare, and the mystery of the letter I had delivered was plain. J.C. to J.C.—James Colt to Josephine Cowan. James Colt, *alias* Philip Blair, a British spy, to Josephine Cowan, an offspring of the devil. The likeness betwixt Blair and myself was due to consanguinity, and not to a freak of nature.

I saw it all in a second. I say a second, but I was not cognizant of the passage of time; I was too overwhelmed. And yet, withal, I did not fail to draw my conclusions, and with recent events for a premise there was no difficulty in doing it. It was evident that I had been recommended to Tallmadge for a purpose. I had been sent home that I might meet the fate of my uncle, only, being in health, I was to be made to compromise myself as a spy and so be hanged; failing in that, another way would probably be devised. Something of this I had known through the letter, but it came upon me with double force when I realized my life was being plotted for by one of my own blood, though the motive was as

A DISCOVERY

yet beyond my comprehension. Politics alone would not account for such fiendishness, though politics evidently had some weight. Jealousy could bear no part in it. Fear, that devil of the world—they had hitherto nothing to fear from me. Money—I was penniless and dependent on my uncle, but herein might be the key, preposterous though it seemed, for according to the letter my cousin was penniless also, though all would be right when his purpose had been consummated.

There is a divine mercy; there is a divine guidance; there is a potency in love against which hell can not prevail. By “love” I do not mean passion, but broad charity, and I swear that as I sat opposite my simple and ill-favored aunt and clearly saw the plot, if not its cause, I had less hatred for those who were attempting to wrong me than pity for their unwitting connivance to their own damnation. As I ran over events I saw Providence in each one of them. My awakening had not been chance; it was the working of the law. My knowledge had been given to me that I might be armed.

Let me here say that the religious doctrines of the day had fallen on barren soil so far as I was concerned. I had no religious creed that could not be comprehended in the golden rule. In me theology found no niche on which to rest, and for this lack I had been called to account more than once, and had not the state of the country so upset the course of the institution with which I was connected, had not politics risen above Presbyterianism, I fancy I should have been obliged to seek a sphere of usefulness beyonds the walls of Yale.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

Therefore I say my feelings were not due to any religious training, but to a spirit which, innate and unhampered, lifted me above the hell of hatred to others, and made me to see clearly that while protection was my right, vengeance was not.

I confess that I was in a physical tremor at the sudden knowledge that Blair was my own cousin, but my lack of self-control did not endure. With perfect composure I spoke to my aunt, who, I was ready to believe, had little to do with the conspiracy, however much she might appear to gain by its success.

"I have but slight knowledge of you, madam; I never knew you had a son. Where is my cousin? Is he in the army?"

"James is a captain in De Lancey's dragoons," she answered, drawing herself up with an air of pride that was unmistakable.

"On special duty?" I suggested.

"Something secret, sir. James never tells me anything about his doin's. I have not heard from him for some time. It is hard to believe you ain't my son. James is a handsome man, an' ye might pass for him anywhere." She looked wonderingly at me; in fact, she had hardly taken her eyes from me.

I might have thanked her for the implied compliment, but resented being coupled with the devil, even in praise. She supplemented her words by asking if I was hungry.

"No," I replied. "I wish to see my uncle; I understand he is sick."

"Ah, yes; he is very low. You had better not see him to-night."

A DISCOVERY

"But I will, nevertheless," I answered, taking up the candle and moving off without ceremony.

She followed me, still feebly protesting, until I entered the sick man's chamber.

"It was so hard to attend to him up-stairs," she added apologetically and without lowering her voice. "We brought him down here when he could no longer leave his bed, and Josephine—Miss Cowan—wanted him where she could see him easy."

I walked to the bedside. My uncle lay in a stupor, and showed no consciousness of the light or of our presence. His eyes were half open and suffused with blood, his jaw drooping, as I had before seen, his face pale, flabby, and clammy, with cold perspiration. There was no fever. I was heart-sick as I turned to the lady.

"How long has he been thus?"

"He has been failin' for more than a month, and he gets no better except sometimes durin' the day. I give him his medicine every night, just exactly as they told me to, but it is hard to get him to speak. I think it's apoplexy."

"Who told you to give him anything?"

"Josephine. The doctor was here and told her what to do."

Amid the mass of my reading I had dipped into medicine, more than half inclined to make it my calling, and though knowing little or nothing of disease from actual experience, I thought I would recognize apoplexy when I saw it. But the case before me bore no likeness to the descriptions I had read. There was no distortion to the face, and, beyond his stertorous breathing, the patient showed no symp-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

tom of the paralysis attending brain suffusion; besides, apoplexy is sudden. As I raised his eyelid I marked the gimlet-like contraction of the pupil.

“What were you giving him?” I asked, turning on her so quickly that she jumped and held out her skinny hand, as if to ward me off.

“Oh, I don’t know—I don’t know. Black drops, I think. It’s what the doctor told us, and——”

I interrupted fiercely.

“Where did you get those rings, madam?” I demanded, pointing to the gems on her fingers. “They were my mother’s! Who gave them to you? Take them off!”

It was cruel the fright I gave her, but the sight of the well-known circlets that were so out of place on her withered hands made me angry; besides I had my part to play.

She covered her face and began to cry.

“James told me I might wear them,” she said between her sobs. “Oh, you are so like James—so quick! I didn’t know; indeed, I didn’t know!” And she began stripping them from her hands. I placed them in my pocket, well assured that nothing, not even my uncle’s strong box, had been proof against James, and as well satisfied that I could dominate my aunt.

My next move was for the medicine, for I had suspicions that amounted almost to a certainty. But I got no satisfaction from the lady. She assured me that the last dose had been given to the invalid, and I myself bore witness to the emptiness of the bottle from which she had poured it. But the bottle was no longer to be found, and this led me to fear

A DISCOVERY

that my aunt was not as innocent as she would have me believe.

It would not be policy to create such a suspicion in her mind, but my heart felt tight and hard when I recognized the havoc that had been played with my uncle's health, though whether through ignorance or by intention it had not yet been possible to determine. However, that my aunt should have further charge of the sick man was out of the question.

There were two slaves on the farm, a half-breed called the Black Prince and his wife, Nancy. The man had a strain of Massapequa blood in his veins, and claimed descent from a former king of the tribe which had once roved over the larger portion of Long Island. Hence his name.

"Where is the Prince?" I asked, moderating my voice into something resembling kindness.

"I sent him to Oyster Bay this morning after more medicine," the lady answered, still sobbing and sniffing. "He has not come back yet."

"Then we must have Nancy to help you. Is she still here?"

"She's where she belongs, I suppose," was the answer, given with considerable asperity. "I hate the niggers! I suppose you will upset the house finely."

"I think it likely, madam. My uncle is very ill and must have proper attention, and you are not strong enough to take entire charge. I will relieve you. Remain here; I will return in a few moments."

I left her abruptly; she still crying weakly, like a child, and looking at her hands, as if in effort to realize their barrenness. There was a light in the slave cabin, the door standing wide open to the balmy

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

air of the night. The negress, Nancy, was bending over a newly born infant in her lap, and as she looked up and saw me she opened her black eyes and stared as if she were confronted with a vision, then with a howl she threw her apron over her head, and gathering up the infant, bolted into the back room, slamming the door behind her.

At this I was well-nigh as startled as she had been at my advent, but thinking she had mistaken me for my redoubtable cousin, I did not attempt to press my intrusion, but turned to the barn, the wide-open door of which showed a great black square. The barn was well-nigh as barren as if just raised. The mow was almost empty of hay, and of the four horses I had known but one remained—a poor brute, evidently too valueless to be stolen. The moon, slanting its light broadly on to the floor, faintly illuminated the interior, and I could see that the farm wagons were gone, not a wheeled vehicle remaining save one, an old one, half traveling chaise, half coach, which my uncle had bought in New York, and which had been a great innovation, a nine days' wonder, when he had brought it hither. The dust of years lay on it, the tarnished gilt of the doors and moth-eaten hammer-cloth alone indicating its past splendors. The sight of the ruin and the surrounding desolation made me heart-sick, and I was about returning to the house when I heard the tramp of an approaching horse, and a moment later Prince rode on to the floor. He was ragged beyond the telling, the extreme shabbiness of his garments being offset by an immense scarlet cockade he wore in his rimless hat. I recognized the black face I loved, but he did not mark me.

A DISCOVERY

As the negro dismounted I stepped forward into the light calling him by name.

"Dat you, Massa Colt?" he answered.

"No, Prince; it's Master John," I said, going toward him.

At that the fellow let out something like a wail of horror and fell on his knees by his horse, his hands clasped, his eyes staring, and his mouth working over a jumble of words that were doubtless meant for a prayer. I was tired being treated like a ghost, and my nerves had nearly found their limit of strain. Catching the slave by the collar, I shook him as I would a child, calling him by name again and again, and finally got him to his feet, he looking at me blankly and shaking like an aspen.

"O Gawd! go 'way, Mass' John! You's daid—you's daid!" he whispered, the drool running from his mouth, his face green in the moonlight.

"Dead, man!" I exclaimed. "Not half as dead as you! I am John—John Chester from college!"

It took me some time to convince him, and despite all that had happened I was forced to laugh at his antics. Finally he touched my face with his horny hand, and said:

"Thank de Lawd, you's sure enough John an' you ain't daid! But you gave me pow'ful shock."

"Who told you I was dead?" I asked, after I had him quieted.

"Mass' Colt told us; de squire, he told us. O Lawd! if de ole squire only wake up an' know you ain't daid before he die!"

The last word hurt.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"What's that red rag for?" I interrupted, pointing at his tattered hat.

"Dat rag? Dat ain't no rag! Dat's my sign, Mass' John. It shows I 'longs to a royalist fambly. But it doan do no good. De sojers take de two bes' hosses, mos' all de hay, all de sheep, an' leave only one ole cow. Dey takes all de wagons an' all de poultry 'cept some I got hid in de woods. I doan know what's to become ob us. De squire, he turns for King Gawge, an' cose I hadder to turn too, but it doan make no diff'rence."

It was as I had supposed; friend and foe were being robbed alike. My uncle's change of base was paralleled in hundreds of cases and not to be wondered at, but it had been of slight avail.

But politics had little interest for me at that moment; there were more important matters on hand, and I asked the slave if he had the medicine for which he had been sent. With something of his old manner of moving quickly he went to the saddle-bags and brought out a package, but before breaking the covering I read the superscription. It had been originally directed to Miss Josephine Cowan, but the name was scratched out and that of Squire Emberson substituted. Without hesitation I opened it. Inside was a bottle containing about half a pint of black liquid. There was a New York mark on the label, but the name of the apothecary was entirely obliterated. I uncorked it and smelled the contents, then touched my tongue to the drug and gave vent to an oath. Well might I have sworn, for it was laudanum, pure and simple. My uncle was being deliberately poisoned.

CHAPTER XI

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

Not for a moment did it occur to me that the black was implicated in this crime, nor was I ready to believe that my Aunt Cornelia was knowingly an accessory. It would have been strange, indeed, if she could have been made to connive at the death of her own brother, especially as her age precluded the idea of an ambition of any sort and the heyday of her blood had long since passed. Prince and his wife were equally out of the question, for I was aware that both loved the old gentleman and had served him with the fidelity of a dog. To Prince I would have trusted my life and interests with greater freedom than to many of his so-called superiors. The wild indignation that overcame me at the confirmation of my fears was soon followed by a depression almost unendurable. I felt as if I carried the world on my shoulders. What would I not have given for Cogswell at that juncture, as much for moral support as aught else. My head was clear enough, but I was unused to sailing alone on such deep waters. For a few moments I felt that I would like to be propped until I could gather my bearings and sufficient force to act with the energy demanded. This condition was harder than that in which I learned

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

my first lesson in secrecy. I was going through a strict school, and God knows that later I had need of the training.

As I spat the nauseous stuff from my mouth the black said:

"I doan wonder you swear, Mass' John. If dat black drops make a well man sick, how can it make a sick man well? Das what I'd like ter know!"

It was a profound question, applying to most drugs, and I have never been able to find its answer.

"Have they given much of it to the squire?" I asked.

"Not so much as all dat."

"Have you ever taken care of him?"

"No. Dey won't let me or Nancy go into de house. Miss Colt, she got a tongue like er whip, an' Mass' Colt, he tole us we 'longs to him now, an' must obey de missus. We never go into the house 'cept we's called. De squire, he doan say anything. He just sleeps an' sleeps an' snores an' doan say anything an' doan eat anything. No man can't live without eating, Mass' John."

"We will change matters, if not too late," I said with bitterness and a sudden determination. "Come with me, and pay no attention to Mrs. Colt, no matter what she commands. I am master here. If you are asked about the medicine, say you did not get it; it had not arrived. Prince, if you will help me I will save the squire."

"Mass' John, I would die fo' de squire," he answered with a simple earnestness that was more convincing than a dozen oaths.

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

"Come, then," I said, pocketing the bottle; "we have a night's work before us."

The candle still stood on the table by the side of the bed, but my aunt had disappeared. The invalid lay as I had left him. For all that I now knew that my uncle's life hung in the balance, I entered the room more hopeful than when I had left it, for after the swift depression, on my way back, I argued that if he were suffering from continued small doses of laudanum only, if there was no disease, it would not be impossible to save him. Stoppage of the poison, a treatment such as a slight knowledge of medicine and common sense suggested, should bring about his speedy recovery. What, then, remained? To guard him during his convalescence, to deceive the woman who fancied she held me in her power, to attend to the slight matter relating to Annie Kronje, and then to place my uncle and myself beyond the reach of our enemies. It was not impossible—aye, it was even feasible; and then to hunt down the devil who had his facial double in me.

Under this reasoning my nervous tension relaxed a trifle; the picture I drew braced me in my determination; yea, so potent is mentality that it helped me to carry it out.

The first thing I did was to send for both hot and cold water, as the squire's extremities were bloodless. Prince shortly brought both, then the door was locked and the battle began. By main strength we shifted the invalid until he sat up, his feet in the scalding liquid, his head covered with a cold compress. Though still almost oblivious to his surroundings and so besotten that his head sagged so that his

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

chin rested on his chest, he soon showed a meed of intelligence by trying to open his eyes and turn his head to look at me, but his look was meaningless. Had I but had plenty of strong coffee I might have rallied him further at once, but I was using all the means at command, and real coffee was out of the question at that period of the war, while stimulants would have been worse than useless. With gentle and continued slapping of the surface of the body, hard rubbing with a cloth, and repeated douches of cold water, we brought the old gentleman to a point where he could sit up unassisted, though he swayed from weakness. The flesh began to glow under the friction, and, as I noticed a return of blood to the surface, I became certain that the poison had been administered in small doses rather than in large and killing drafts.

It must have been midnight when I first heard my uncle's voice. He mumbled something quite unintelligible, and thinking the time ripe, the black and I each took an arm and walked him up and down the room, still slapping and rubbing at intervals. The irresistible propensity to sleep was gradually leaving him. He began to protest incoherently, and finally, though it was not until the third candle had guttered itself out and the lividness of early morning showed faintly through the window that I heard a well-defined "damn" issue from his lips, and the sound was sweeter than the twittering of the early stirring birds without.

For myself, by this time I was completely exhausted. My ankle ached like a boil and my head was splitting. Prince, sturdy as an oak, threw ques-

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

tioning glances at me as if to ask whether the perambulating was ever to end, but it was not until the squire was so far recovered as to fight to disengage himself, and I had become well-nigh as feeble as he, that we led him back to his bed. We had been uninterrupted throughout the night.

Though I had told the black nothing of the character of the so-called medicine or of my suspicions concerning the treatment of the squire, I fancy he caught at the nature of affairs, for as he marked the certain and continued improvement of his old master his eyes showed their joy even when he said:

“Some pusson haffer pay big for dis yer business, Mass’ John. You didn’t get home none too soon—none too soon.”

All that day Prince and I watched and slept alternately. I administered nourishment to my uncle, giving him slight doses of chicken broth, for the sake of which the roost in the woods was robbed. Though he had in a great measure passed from under the influence of the opiate, he was still a very sick man, much too weak to speak above a whisper, and when not sleeping his bleared eyes followed me about the room in a wondering fashion that was pitiful.

Yet I did not think it best to make myself known. If he thought me dead, if he thought his nurse was my cousin, the self-deception would better remain. I was afraid that any shock might send him into the gulf over which he seemed to be hanging.

It was a magnificent day. The sunlight, broken by the trees, moved over the floor and brought bright-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

ness to the room, albeit it discovered the dust and neglect that lay on its interior. The cool breeze from the ocean whipped the muslin curtains into a mad dance, and its breath brought hope and health and strength where it was most needed. I became a trifle worried at the continued absence of my aunt, until Nancy informed me that her ladyship was in her room, where she had remained all day, and thinking her action was due to a fit of the sulks, I rested easily so far as she was concerned. I made some provision for the future by posting Prince as to his conduct, bidding him answer questions about my uncle to the effect that for all the care we were giving him he was no better. Late in the day I considered it would be policy for me to call on my aunt, and so went to her.

She received me like an ill-tempered child at first, but when I told her I hoped she felt much better for the rest, and asked her to join me at supper, she so far relented as to inquire graciously after her brother, at which I drew a despairing picture of alternating stupor and delirium. I would have given much to have read the lady's mind, but that being impossible, I contented myself with a knowledge of her present occupation, and concluded, from the broad ink stain on her finger, that she had been writing. As I left her and returned down-stairs, wondering how long I could carry out my deception, and feeling sure that its premature discovery would bring matters to a head at once, through the hall window I saw Miss Cowan coming through the garden. The sight of her brought out a cold perspiration all over me, and hurrying to the library I ordered Prince to

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

allow no one to enter the room on any pretext during my absence, and all unkempt as I was, went to intercept the woman who, like an angel of death, menaced my life and liberty.

But death comes on a pale horse and is costumed in grave-clothes, while the lady bore no suggestion of her mission. She was the embodiment of life, and her dress brought out her full rich beauty with startling emphasis. She was attired in black, though the effect was the reverse of somber, for on her bosom lay a bunch of immense yellow oxeye daisies, evidently gathered in the fields. A yellow feather trailed from her hat and over her dark hair, and a fan of golden gauze suspended by a yellow ribbon hung from her wrist. The red of her cheeks, seen through the olive of her skin, gave richness to her complexion, and her black eyes sparkled. The breeze fluttered the thin texture she wore and tossed the great plume on her hat. There was nothing of death about her. The ruby of her full lip, her white teeth, the exquisite lines of her figure, and the twinkle of the yellow rosettes on her black satin slippers as they peeped in and out from beneath her skirts as she walked had no menace in them. It was perfect. It was the fulness of the year; it was glorious womanhood. Well might Tryon worship and Simcoe grovel. She was enough to subjugate the devil, this siren, this insult to femininity—to subjugate all but me. Figuratively, I drew my sword as I approached her.

She walked leisurely, as became her dignity, but quickened her pace a trifle as she saw me, smiling graciously and holding out her silk-mitted hand as I came up to her. But with a glance at my face the

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

smile died and an expression of grave concern took its place. As I bowed low and lifted her smooth fingers to my lips she said:

"Your eyes, my friend, tell me a sad tale. You are going to say the squire is no better. Oh, I am so sorry!"

"He is no better," I answered briefly, uttering my lie as glibly as she had uttered hers.

"May I not see him?"

"Nay, madam. For the first time since last night he is quiet. I would not risk having him disturbed; he is showing a tendency to become wild. The Prince is watching him. I saw you coming."

"Does he not know you?"

She drooped her head and patted her gown with her closed fan.

"No," I returned, glad at being able to slip in one truth.

"Ah, what a pity! My friend, my poor friend! Come and tell me all about it. I must know."

She led the way to a summer-house covered with woodbine, a structure rapidly decaying and littered with the *débris* of the previous year.

"Sit here," she said, sinking to the seat and sweeping her skirts aside that I might be close to her. "Is the squire beyond hope, do you think?"

"It is a question hard to answer," I returned, dropping in the space beside her. "You know the adage concerning life and hope, though rather than see him suffer as he did last night I would hope for his ending. Whatever hap is at hand I hope he will soon pass it."

She appeared to be looking through the lace of

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

the hanging vine out into the broad meadows toward the bay, her eyes having a soft, far-away expression. Suddenly she turned to me.

"Do you think the medicine is just the thing for him? Can nothing else be done?"

"What can be done?" I returned, parrying.

"I know not; I can not tell," she exclaimed, unaccountably agitated, at which I marveled at her power of acting and cursed her inwardly, albeit at the same moment I pitied her for the hell she carried in her heart. "You think only of your uncle. What of yourself? You are haggard and pale. You should be nursed instead of nursing. If it is nature having her will with the old gentleman you can not fight it with success."

"Nay, madam; I am not fighting nature. I do not believe God created suffering; I do not believe God created crime, since all he made he looked upon and pronounced good. I am fighting the devil, but am all untrained. I may fail, but I shall have done my duty."

She looked up, her eyes wide and sober. There was no suspicion, only a wondering gaze, as if she were both surprised and struck by the sentiment. Then she said:

"Your aunt is of little help, I know; but need you work alone?"

"It is best so, madam. But my aunt——"

"Have you not something less harsh than 'madam' for me?" she interrupted quickly. "I have saved you and can afford to be generous. Moreover, I am not madam."

There was no trace of flippancy in her words. It

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

was as if a common sorrow had drawn us together. A heavenly smile lit her face as she looked at me.

I almost cried out in protest as I saw the silken web this woman was spinning. Her beauty, linked to such hideousness, was an absolute pain, and yet, for a moment, I reveled in it. I was but a young man. I sat close to this Circe, so close that I caught the faint, subtle perfume that hung about her as the odor hangs over a bank of violets. A fold of her skirt touched me. The warmth of her nature seemed to penetrate and intoxicate me. My blood turned to fire. I wrenched myself from the momentary fascination and rose to my feet in honest fear that in spite of myself I should fall.

“Mistress Josephine——”

“You might curtail it still further without offense, my friend,” she again interrupted in her clear, even voice. “Why should there be formality between us? All your family call me Josephine. I hope we are to know each other well. Sit down.”

“God grant it,” I returned, reseating myself. “Let me first grow used to the idea. You overwhelm me with your graciousness.”

“I wish I might be of further use to you,” she returned. “And if your uncle should—if anything should happen—what then?”

“I should be alone in the world,” I answered.

“Would you return to Connecticut?”

“I would join the army at once, if my foot would permit.”

“Ah, your poor foot! I noticed the lameness. But I might help you here. You could not join the army, but you might still serve our dear cause.”

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

She stopped abruptly and appeared to be thinking. A robin perched on an elm gurgled its evening song; the wind whispered through the vine, and a bee, blundering into the enclosure, buzzed through the tangle of leaves. All else was quiet.

"Yes. And how?"

She suddenly turned about with animation.

"Have you ever heard of one Annie Kronje?"

It was lamely done, for her, but the question came like a thunder-clap, even though I had been waiting for it. My answer was prepared, for I had been expecting this. To deny all knowledge of the spy would be to expose the game I was playing. Fortunately I was not looking at my companion. I did not start, but returned easily:

"I have heard of her, but I do not know her. The major mentioned her name; that is all."

"What major? What did he say?"

"Major Tallmadge thought of giving me some papers to one Annie Kronje, but changed his mind. Who is she?"

"She is a spy in our cause. I must find means of communicating with her. Would you risk doing this for me? For me? You will get your reward."

She leaned lightly toward me and laid her hand on my arm.

"Now?" I asked, more to gain a moment than aught else.

"Oh, no; not now—not now! Would you do it for me—later?"

"Am I not in your debt?" I replied, laying my hand over hers. "I will do aught, in honor, you may command, Josephine."

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

Her reply surprised me. She snatched her hand from my arm and rose to her feet, shuddering as if chilled, and her color changed.

"No, no; not now, not now!" she exclaimed. "I may not need it and—and it would prove dangerous." Then with a quick alteration she drew herself up and with bewitching frankness held out the hand she had pulled away, smiling brilliantly.

"Forget my request—for the time, at least. I must be going. I came only to inquire about the squire. I may come again to-morrow. Good night."

And without waiting for me to escort her, she turned and almost ran down the path to a spot where a black servant stood holding her horse, leaving me wondering.

CHAPTER XII

A DUTCH FUNERAL

BUT my wondering turned to reasoning, and reason soon told me I had been at fault in disclaiming a knowledge of Annie Kronje. If the woman who had left me had faith in my statements (and I had been careful to appear innocently straightforward) she must necessarily conclude that her lover had made a mistake regarding my mission. Failing, then, to make me commit myself as a spy or impart any information that could be used against me, her next move would probably be to have me arrested offhand as a confessed rebel, and if this was done and I should be placed in a prison hulk (a more than probable disposition of me), in all likelihood my days would be numbered as surely, if not as quickly, as if I swung at the end of a rope. The reputation of the floating hells in which the British confined a majority of their captives had spread far and wide, and the thought of being thus mewed up made me sick. I wondered why Blair had not considered this. Had he done so, it is probable that my uncle would be lying dead, and I as effectually removed as if hanged a dozen times. His desire had been to make sure of me, but in his hatred of me, or his fear, he had over-shot himself, as villains often do.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

Even as I thought of my dangerous position I watched the chaise until it disappeared behind a tongue of woods, and with my eye on the vanishing-point I planned to repair my weakened intrenchments. I was aware that I stood upon ticklish ground, and felt as if I had fenced with danger for weeks instead of hours. The tameness of the days I had hated, and to get rid of which I had expressed a willingness to go to the devil, seemed like a far-off oasis—left forever. I had had my wish gratified literally; those days had gone and the devil was close at hand.

But mine is not the nature that finds relief in sobs for past foolishness or present fears. A spirit of stubborn resistance arose in me even during the moment my stomach turned at the mental picture I drew. I shut my eyes and thought hard, and in the half-hour I remained alone in the rustic structure I thought to some purpose, for when I was ready to return to the house I saw a way out for my uncle, at least; as for myself, I would outdevil the devil. A woman is not prone to kill her lover, even if she looks on him as an enemy.

That night I dined with my aunt, and had some effort in pulling a long face and looking depressed as I spoke of the squire. I talked of him constantly, and in truth my aunt's mental caliber would not permit her to soar much above casualties and the weather. I gave her to understand that Prince was an excellent nurse, but though good in that respect he was a poor messenger, and as the medicine he had failed to obtain appeared to be the last chance for my uncle, that I would ride to Oyster Bay on the morrow, get it, and consult with the post doctor as

A DUTCH FUNERAL

well. I considered it strange that my aunt did not again express a wish to see her brother (though it was fortunate, perhaps), and by the grown size of the ink spot which still showed on her finger I understood she had been writing all that day.

Though the squire had greatly improved, I still concealed my identity. He must have become advanced to perfect understanding before I made myself known to him and exposed my half-ripened plans. Once or twice he murmured the word "James" as I went to his side, fondling my hand in his own great, soft palms, and in spite of myself the tears would come to my eyes as I looked down on his wreck and realized that he thought I was the man who in reality wished his death. My uncle was of sturdy stock, and he was making great strides. I was sure of victory, and though I felt I had saved his life, the thing that was furthest from my thoughts at that time was that he would ever save mine.

The next morning I rode away, ostensibly to visit Oyster Bay, but in reality to take the first steps in discovering the whereabouts of Annie Kronje. The invalid had improved to such an extent that I feared a scene and a consequent setback if he should recognize me. Therefore I told Prince to break the news of my return as gently as possible after I was gone; not to allow his master to know the cause of his sickness, and to let no one, not even Miss Cowan, penetrate the room for an instant. Bidding my aunt an affectionate but hypocritical good-by, I departed.

It is twenty miles to Jamaica, but the road, though dusty, was good, and the weather cool and cloudy, else I fear the beast I rode would never have

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

completed the journey. It was but a farm horse, almost entirely grass fed, and so soft from lack of work that in five miles of easy going he lathered in a way that was pitiful and became a sight to behold. Not caring to go by the judge's house and risk another engagement with Miss Cowan, who, I trusted, would not call before I got back, I went across the fenceless fields and the upper end of the swamp and came out on the main road above Tryon Hall. I suffered no interruption throughout the journey, and met very few people, though as I approached the town I was struck by the crushed and barren look of the land, for the hills about had been cleared of every stick of timber to furnish fuel to the enemy lying in New York, and the country was but a bleak, green desert.

The house of Killian Brouer was not difficult to find. I was directed to it by a spiritless-looking farmer who rode a horse a shade worse than my own—and that is scant praise for any beast. However, I was glad to know my way would not lead me to the village, but some two miles to the south, for Jamaica would probably be a British cantonment, and I did not feel up to an attempt on the enemy's lines. It was impossible to miss the house, for it stood in an open space remote from habitations of any kind, one end set, in Dutch fashion, to the lane that led past it. It was a plain building of stone, two stories high, and as was common, the date of its erection was indicated by the figures 1699 sunk into the stucco that covered the space directly under the gable. The solid shutters were closed, as if the place was deserted, but that there was life within I was well as-

A DUTCH FUNERAL

sured by the sight of four or five sorry nags hitched to an immense willow-tree near the door, and the figure of a girl, or woman, with her apron thrown over her head, whom I marked sitting under the rear porch as I passed to the front.

Tying my horse with the others, I went to the brightest of bright-green doors, and with the shiniest of brass knockers knocked loudly. Before the echo had ceased sounding the door was opened by a man who bore the stamp of Holland on him from his short, thick legs to the skull-cap that topped his immense head. His great paunch was covered by a snuff-colored vest that matched the rest of his clothing, and his fishy eyes were red, as if he had been weeping. He looked at me stolidly for a moment, and then said:

“You vish to zee Killian?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“Coom,” he returned phlegmatically, as he opened a door to what, from its location, would have been the parlor in any other house. The place was so dark that it took me a moment to get used to the surrounding gloom, and when I did I noticed a number of men, silent and immovable, sitting against the walls, each smoking a pipe. The air was thick with the fumes of tobacco, and the single lighted candle in the apartment seemed to burn in a halo. However, its faint radiance showed me a box lying on a table in the center of the circle surrounding it. For one moment I was suspicious, then nonplussed, but the matter cleared. I had stumbled upon a Dutch funeral.

Without a word I was led to a seat by the wall,

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

and a filled pipe was handed to me. That was all. No questions were asked, no information was volunteered. It was plain that I was looked upon as a mourner come to pay my respects to the dead, and I had been received with the stolid indifference which characterizes the Dutch.

The profile of the corpse showed through the murky atmosphere, the broad features having taken on that wonderful dignity that death alone gives to the most ordinary mortal. That I had arrived too late, that Killian Brouer lay in the coffin before me, I had little doubt, but I feared to stamp myself as an unwarranted intruder by asking the question, and was even more afraid to break the tomb-like silence, which, with the hot and humid atmosphere of the room, hung over me like a smothering blanket. Presently the door opened and a woman entered bearing a tray covered with glasses filled with wine. Silently she passed from one to the other, each man taking a glass and bending his head as he put his lips to it. There was not the slightest ceremony, and barely a sound as the square figure, made almost squat by a short and thick quilted petticoat and close white hood, made the rounds. Like a ghost she came and departed, and like ghosts in the gloom the assembled company sipped their wine with bowed heads. Never was grief more plain, never more unostentatious, yet never more impressive. The sound of a human voice would have been desecration, a sob would have set my nerves soaring.

I know not how long I sat thus; possibly an hour—it seemed longer. But when, finally, the silence and inaction had become well-nigh unendurable, when my

A DUTCH FUNERAL

eyes smarted like fire under the nettle of the smoke and the candle was burning low, one man rose to his feet, placed his empty pipe and glass on the vacated seat, and softly stole away. He was followed by another and another, and readily taking the hint, I followed suit, and once more found myself in the open air.

One after another the visiting mourners mounted and went their ways with unusual alacrity, I thought. No one offered me the hand of friendship, or for that matter paid me more attention than to look at me askance and move off as if loath to come in close contact with one who was a total stranger. There was nothing to marvel at in this, for I was aware how guarded was the geniality of the Dutch until their confidence had been acquired, and I conceived that their present aloofness arose from the additional fear that I might be an interloper whose presence was due to the peculiar situation of political affairs on Long Island—in short, that I was a British emissary who had been detailed to make sure the gathering was as innocent as on its face it appeared to be.

But what to do under the circumstances I was at a loss to determine. I was about to take the questionable step of going to the rear of the house and pushing my inquiries among the women, when the man who had admitted me appeared at the front door. He came out, still smoking, and sat himself down on the narrow plank that is a feature in every Dutch porch, and though he saw me he made no sign of recognition. I went up to him.

"I did not know until I came here that Killian was dead," I began.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"Na?" he vouchsafed, without raising his eyes.

"No. I had important business with him."

"Yah?" was the slow reply.

"Yes; very important. Who takes his place?"

He hesitated as if cudgeling his brains, and without removing his pipe from his mouth finally answered:

"I vas his son."

"Ah!" I returned, nettled at his sluggish indifference. "Then perhaps you can give me some information concerning a woman called Annie Kronje?"

As I uttered the name he took his eyes from the distant landscape and looked at me.

"Annettje Kronje? Yah?"

"Yes."

"Und vat would you haf of Annettje? Dot vos fair."

"The sinews of war," said I, without reserve.

His pipe popped from his mouth like a stopper, and with an energy I had thought impossible he turned his face quickly to the open door behind him and laid his thick hand over my mouth.

"Hush! hush! you tam fool!" he said fiercely, getting to his feet as if he were a boy. "Coom mit myself!"

He seized me by the arm and led me to the willow, out of earshot from the house, then turning, said quietly:

"Say dot vonce again. Vot you vant mit Annettje?"

I repeated the formula.

"Ah, yah; der sinews ov der var; und vat else you wants mit Annettje?"

A DUTCH FUNERAL

"That's none of your damn business!" I returned, following my instructions to the letter.

At this he held out his hand to me with a sigh of relief, though his face was as sober as if he had never smiled. But there was an abundance of cordiality in the terrific clinch he gave my fist. I would have cried out, save I thought he might be testing my endurance.

"Dot vos all rightd!" he exclaimed, as he finally dropped my paralyzed fingers. "Der fadder told me ven he knew he vas going away. Annettje Kronje vos owd; she vas nod here, nod now. Sometimes after to-day—in two days—you cooms back und asks for Annettje Kronje. Maype I shows you Annettje. Yah, I tinks so. In two days. Go now. You vas nod Dutch und might make us suspicioned. I vas Joris Brouer, und who vas you?"

"Emberson," I answered without hesitation, for it instantly struck me that the name might be familiar.

"Py Oyster Pay? Yah?"

"Yes."

"Vell, you haf some hay to sell me. Coom and tell me about it in two days. Get on your harse und go now."

He turned away heavily and rolled back to the porch, where he sat looking at me as I climbed into the saddle, his face bearing no more expression than lies in a pan of dough. It was almost comical, and would have been entirely so had I not known the tragedy of grief he kept so closely locked in his broad bosom.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PLAN

I WAS by no means content with the result of this interview, for to me time had become a matter of the greatest importance, and a delay of two days might mean the marring of my plans to escape from the dangers surrounding me. In my ignorance I had thought that the mention of Annie Kronje would have resulted in an immediate introduction to that person, a transfer to me of a quantity of gold to weight my saddle-bag, and freedom to take my uncle and myself to a less threatened region. It never occurred to me that the woman, as Annie Kronje, might be a myth, that the name was but a key or token by which I simply identified myself. I was to be awakened later; awakened to a future I had never dreamed possible; a future which, to this day, God knows, leaves me no opening for regret.

The sun had broken through the lowering clouds and was setting when I arrived home. After caring for my wearied and almost useless horse, I went to the house, glad to have returned, but my trials for the day had not ended. The sound of voices came to me while I was yet at a distance, and as I entered the hall I knew that trouble was brewing. Before the door of the sick man stood my aunt and

THE PLAN

Prince, the former speaking in high-pitched and shrill-voiced anger, the latter barring her way into the room. The lady was dressed for going out. As she saw me she wheeled about, and the storm was transferred to my head.

"Have you given orders to that man?" she vociferated, her eyes flashing, her bony finger, pointed at the slave, shaking an emphasis to every word she uttered. "Have you given such orders to that man—that nigger? Am I not to see my own brother? Am I nothing here? Have I——"

"My dear aunt," I interposed, "I gave orders not to have my uncle disturbed; that is all. I could allow Prince no discretion. Do you wish to speak to your brother?"

"It is none of your business what I want. Oh, I wish James was here!"

"I would to God he was!" I interrupted. "Prince, how is the squire?"

"He's asleep, sah," answered the negro, screwing up one eye.

"Very well, madam. You shall see him when he wakes. Will that do?"

"No, it will not do," she replied snappishly, trying to mimic my voice and gesture, the plume on her hat shaking like a tree in an earthquake and every fiber of her little body in motion. "If I can't see my own brother when I wish, and as often as I wish, and how I wish, if I can't be with him and nurse him and do for him as well as you or that nigger, then this house is no place for me! I'm going! His death will be on your head—your head, sir!" she said, nodding violently and growing more excited with

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

each word she spoke. "Do you understand? And then you will wish you had made a friend of me. Oh, I know something—and I know you, you rebel!"

She shot the last word out with such an air of hatred that she seemed to recoil like a fired gun, and turning away, fairly ran from the house.

"Where is she going?" I asked.

"Don't know, Mass' John; but de Lawd knows I's glad she's gone anywhere so's she's outen here."

I went to the rear window and saw the irate lady hurrying through the garden, anon turning her head and scowling at the house. I dare say she hoped to be followed and conciliated, but I was as glad of her absence as ever Prince could be, and watched her as she gathered up her skirts and strode westward along the main road, walking as rapidly and easily as a woman of thirty, one hand shading her eyes from the glare of the level sunbeams, the other lifting her petticoats until her spindle limbs were plainly in evidence.

With this episode as a welcome home, I went into my uncle's room. I wished that Prince had prepared me. As I cleared the threshold I saw the squire sitting by the window, fully dressed, the muslin curtains drawn to exclude vision from without. His frame was shaking with excitement, his face, turned expectantly toward the door, shone with a wonderful light. As he saw me he pulled himself to his feet, and with something between a cry and a groan, toppled forward, and throwing his arms around my neck, kissed me again and again, patted me on the cheek, held me off to look at my face, only to reembrace me and laugh hysterically, showering on me the while ex-

THE PLAN

pressions of endearment such as a man might give to the woman he loved. Finally he clung to me, the tears streaming from his eyes, his great chest shaking with the sobs he could not control.

This whirlwind of affection affected me as nothing had ever before done, and for a space we both held each other in close embrace, while the negro stood by the door blubbering and chuckling alternately. Gradually we came down to the level of calmer emotions, and finally to that deep sobriety which marks reaction from strong excitement. It was imperative that my uncle should be put in possession of all the circumstances of my coming, and I began, even as I began this story, leading up step by step to the present moment, though I omitted mentioning the nature of my instructions from Major Tallmadge, the contents of the letter to Miss Cowan, and the discovery that he had been dosed with laudanum. I was willing that he should draw his own conclusions before I expressed mine, but I do not think he gave as much thought to my words as to my person, and I was finally forced to state bluntly that, in my belief, my cousin and Miss Cowan were plotting for the lives of both him and myself, though for what reason I could not fathom.

He had listened without interruption and without once removing his eyes from me. Indeed, he seemed to feast on me, anon reaching out and touching my face much as Prince had done when I surprised him in the barn, and passing his hand over his forehead as if striving to sweep away some thought. But that he had heard and understood me was apparent, for when I had finished and was about unfolding my

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

plan of escape, he shook his white head and directed me to bring him a certain package of papers from the box beneath his bed. But there was no package there, strictly speaking, though there were plenty of scattered papers, and I dragged the box before him that he might see for himself how his private matters had been probed.

There was every evidence that the chest had been tampered with, though nothing was missing save the rings which had been in the box and which I had recovered from my aunt. After much fumbling, my uncle found what he wished.

"John," said he, setting his teeth, "I have listened to ye carefully, and am free to say that I think ye are wild—that is, so far as the matter concerns me. War is one thing and villainy another. Ye speak of a motive. Here is my last will, and if ye think it lies in this ye must make it clear to me; ye must prove it. Yet if it lies not in this, it has only party spirit to spring from. That might be enough to mark ye, but not me—not me. Ye must be wrong. I got the judge to draw this up two years ago, when it was reported ye were probably dead, though I would not at first believe it. It was about then that your Aunt Cornelia wrote to me begging for a home after a tale of trouble and ruin caused by the war. I thought it unchristian of me to let my sister pine in the city, and so, being lonely for want of ye, I bid her come here. Of her son I knew naught, and had well-nigh forgotten she had one until she had set herself down here, bag and baggage. I thought I would make amends for my past coldness, though we never had agreed, and never can; but no sooner had she be-

THE PLAN

come well at home than she forced her son on me. It was soon after that I heard through him that ye had died. It was an awful time—just after the defeat at Brooklyn—and I made no objection to James coming, especially as it would be some protection to have a royal officer at home in the house. In faith, my boy, he looked so like ye, so like the lad I thought might, mayhap, be dead; he was so smooth, so kind, and kept so many of the raiders at bay, that I warmed to him a bit, and it was after your aunt's repeated hinting at an injustice done to her son, that no allowance was made to him while all went to ye, that I gave him a small monthly stipend. The war soon finished most of the loose gold about, for my income from the city was stopped and I had enough work to keep the place over my head, for confiscation was always threatened; and when both your aunt and Josephine, who was always about, advised me to will it to James for the reason that as the prospective property of a king's man it would be let alone, I had this drawn up by the judge. Having saved the property, I took the oath to keep my bones out of prison. What is there in this to cause a man to damn himself by attempting murder?"

"What is James Colt to Josephine Cowan?" I asked.

"I know not. They were much together, and I knew they quarreled finely at times—lovers' quarrels, I fancy. The girl came as companion to Mrs. Jones, going to the Fort Neck house about the time your aunt wrote to me. She is all graciousness and so fond, and full of life and the beauty that catches the eye, that I liked her and trusted her. She took

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

command of matters here after James went and I first became sick, your aunt being well-nigh useless for anything save tears and complaints, and she has been here each day until of late. 'Twas she who advised me to take the oath for safety. I was not well then, or I would have seen them damned first. I had been beset on all sides, and it was getting to be too much to bear. So far as the war is concerned, my hands are now tied, but if ye can prove the deviltry ye more than insinuate I will take another oath to make both mother and son sweat blood for their doings. The state of the box tells me little but of my sister's vanity. It can not be true—my own sister! It can not be true—no, no! Read this and then say if it is enough to make a man wish to do murder."

My uncle was growing agitated and I took the paper as much to compel him to pause as for any curiosity I had. I fancied I could prove the fact without getting at a reason for it.

The document was long and written in the fashion that lawyers have, or one that goes far to make a clear matter unintelligible. The repetitions of "wherefore" and "whereas" and "said," and a dozen other technicalities got me in a snarl inside of twenty lines, but I made out that most of it was a description of my uncle's estate and its numerous boundary lines. At his death his slaves were to be manumitted and provided for. The whole paper was laboriously written, and the gist or principal clause lay at the end.

"To my nephew, James Colt, I leave my entire estate, personal and real, excepting the slaves, with instructions to furnish his mother for her life with

THE PLAN

a sum not less than one hundred pounds a year, *provided* that my nephew John Chester, cousin to the said James Colt, is dead without issue at the time of my decease. If the said John Chester is alive at the date of my decease, my entire estate shall revert to him without restriction. In the event of lawful issue by him, he being dead, said estate shall be equally divided between said James Colt and the child or children of said John Chester, all to share and share alike."

This was followed by the usual formal closing, and the squire's signature, "Robert Emberson," was witnessed by Judge Jones himself.

It was a convincing paper, one that to my mind furnished the animus for crime in a nature at once destitute of principle and affection. It was difficult to conceive of such cold-blooded inhumanity as had been planned. It has been said that one recognizes sin only as one is capable of sin. In that case I must be a boweless villain, but I doubt if I have it in me to sink to the level of my cousin.

I handed the paper back to my uncle.

"That is sufficient for me," I said. "Let me read you a document to balance it—the will that is working in James Colt." And I repeated, almost word for word, the translation of the cipher letter, the contents of which were branded on my memory past obliteration.

The squire grasped the arms of his chair convulsively as I recited the message, and knowing I could put a convincing, even if rather dramatic climax to this, I stepped to the shelf and brought out the untouched bottle of laudanum.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"And this is the cause of your sickness," I said, handing it to him. "A few more doses, a little more time, and they would have had but me to work on. The law would give every stiver to Colt, though I died after you. What rights would a spy have possessed?"

He uncorked the bottle, and one whiff of its contents told him the nature of the drug.

"Oh, my God! my God!" he exclaimed. "Can this thing be? Has my sister——"

"No, no; I think she is innocent," I interrupted, for his agony was painful to witness. "I think she was but a tool in their hands. I don't believe she knows laudanum from ditch-water. They would never have taken her into their confidence, though they would readily use her. Give her the benefit of the doubt, at least."

"Aye, a doubt, and but a doubt," he returned, setting his square jaw in a manner which, as a boy, I used to fear. "Yes, yes; possibly, as you say; but she must never see me again; she must never step inside of this house."

"Indeed, she must," I said. "We are not strong enough to threaten, and I have work to do in Jamaica which can not be left undone."

"What would you have me do? Sit still and make no protest? Shall that girl from yonder house come and go, and smile and fawn as if she wish for my death was not in her black heart?"

"Exactly," I returned. "We are both standing on the ragged edge. We are in the enemy's camp. If for one moment either Josephine Cowan or James Colt suspected that we knew a tithe of what we do,

THE PLAN

if they feared their plans were not working smoothly, we should be ruined. Josephine Cowan could command a British squad to fall on this house as readily as she commanded and obtained my freedom. Now see the position I am in. I am serving my country. In honor to myself and the work I have undertaken I can not run away; nor can you, in your present state. In a few days we may be able to get off together, but until then——”

At that moment Prince interrupted me. He had been listening with mouth and eyes wide open, but suddenly he ran to the window.

“Mass’ John, Miss Jos’phine done comin’ up de road.”

My uncle, forgetting his weakness, sprang to his feet with an oath.

“God! Let me get at her!” he exclaimed, going to the door.

“Nay—nay, sir,” I cried, catching him by the arm and speaking rapidly. “You will spoil all I had planned! You must die; be raving now and die to-morrow.”

He turned and looked at me in very fear.

“Don’t you understand? You must pretend; pretend delirium. Shout, curse, do anything, but do not overdo it. I will bring that woman to the door and let her listen. Prince will be nursing you; I will be heartbroken? Do you see? Then in a few days you wander off in your delirium; escape from Prince and drown yourself in the bay. I will arrange a haven away from here; I know not where yet. Don’t balk me in this, Uncle Bob. Trust me and do as I say.—Prince, do you understand?”

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"'Deed I do. She's gettin' outen de shay, Mass' John."

"Then you will hide until I am free," I continued, speaking again to the old gentleman. "Our safety lies in pretense. If she sees you almost well she will guess all, as I have told her you could not live. Can you not follow me?"

I was fairly incoherent from haste, but he stopped with his hand on the latch of the door and there hung a moment, and for that moment I wondered if he would bring ruin on his own head and mine by exposing his condition and my deceit to the lady who was about turning into the path. Then his eye brightened and a grim smile (the first I had seen) played over his set lips.

"By Jehovah, I'll do it! Die, and then come to life and confound them! I see—I see! By the Lord Harry! it is turning tragedy into farce and back to tragedy, for if there's justice in Almighty God some one will die for this work! Good boy, John! Go!"

He tore the ribbon from his queue and tossed his long gray hair about his face. I left him stripping back the clothes from his bed and heard the click of the latch as Prince plugged the fall.

If ever I was to act a part again the time had come, and I was thankful the rapidly falling dusk would, to some extent, veil my features from the astute woman I was about to confront. Pulling my neckcloth awry and loosening my waistcoat that I might appear sufficiently disheveled, I half reeled from the house, meeting the lady as she put her foot on the bottom step of the piazza.

THE PLAN

She stopped as she saw me, still holding up the skirt she had lifted, and looked in open amazement as I staggered down to her.

"What has happened?" she asked, holding out her free hand, which I seized and brought to my lips. "Is the squire dead?"

"Not yet; not yet," I replied, bowing my head to conceal my face.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed fervently and with such a tone of relief that I was taken aback. "Is—is he worse, then?"

"O madam — O Josephine! he can not remain long in his present state. It is harder to bear than death itself. I am undone. I thought you would never come again! Can you not do something? Step here; listen."

I led her into the house, but a sudden weakness seemed to have overtaken her, for she grasped my arm and so supported herself up the steps and into the hall, where she sank on to the carved settle and rested her head on her hand. Through the long corridor came the sound of muffled groans, followed by a shout and a series of indistinct oaths, mingled with the soothing voice of Prince; then for one moment silence reigned, and again came a renewed outburst. It was of a man in the wildest delirium.

The girl lifted her eyes and looked at me. I could see but little more than her great orbs set in a face from which the color had fled, and if ever horror was depicted on a human countenance it was on hers, though the gloom of the hall concealed much of it.

"Are you still giving that medicine?" she asked in a strident whisper.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

“What else is there?” I asked dejectedly.

“Then stop it; stop it,” she cried vehemently and rising to her feet. “It may be the doctor does not know. I have thought of this. Give him no more and see what comes of it; it may not be too late.”

“It has hitherto quieted him,” I returned. “But unless the Almighty intervenes he is beyond the reach of medicine of any kind. Do you wish to see him? You might soothe——”

“Oh, no — no,” she interrupted, putting her hands to her ears as the sound of another burst of violence came down the silent hall. “Not for the world; not for all the world. To hear is more than I can endure. Who is with him?”

“Prince; he is invaluable. My aunt has gone—angry at me.”

“Yes, I know. She is at our house. She told me, but I defended you. That is why I came, and to tell you to stop the medicine. O John! my poor friend!”

She walked to the door with her hand held out as in an invitation for me to follow, a look of absolute suffering on her face. Right well she might have worn it, but so genuine did it appear that I was almost in doubt whether it sprang from an awakening of her withered conscience or was mere facial control. She had boasted of being an actress, and to this day I am not sure which it was, but I have my suspicions.

I went out after her, and together we stood facing each other, neither speaking, for I was disinclined to force my part and she—God knows what a hell was raging within her bosom. A single star was shining high in the west; a dull, coppery glow laid warm

THE PLAN

along the flat horizon, promising heat, and the air was soft and balmy. Thus we remained for a space with no noise coming from within, for I had closed the door behind me in fear that the squire would overdo his part. Suddenly and without warning the girl broke into a perfect storm of sobbing, and so potent are tears to command the sympathy of man, so absolutely astonished was I at this exposition of her versatility, yet so genuinely moved by this sign of distress, that I was but half acting as I stepped to the girl's side and passed my arm around her waist, supporting her as though I were her brother or lover. With complete abandonment she turned to me, as sorrow turns toward sympathy, and burying her face on my shoulder, wept as I had never known woman to weep before, nor have I since.

But weakness was not a protracted condition with one of her nature. As abruptly as the storm had begun it terminated. Slowly she drew herself away from me, and, as though oblivious of my presence, stretched out her arms to the infinite space before her.

"Oh, that I were a child again! an innocent child or dead!" she cried in a deep voice; then she turned to me. "Forget that you have seen me thus, my friend; but—but your uncle's danger has quite upset me. I—I must cease thinking. Is there nothing I can do for you?"

She smiled faintly and stepped to the path.

"Nothing you can do," I replied; "yet I would not have you leave me."

"Come with me, then, as far as the road." And she held out her hand.

I followed, and she took the path that led around

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

the house on the opposite side from my uncle's room, as though dreading to hear his voice. As she reached the center of the garden she stopped under a syringa-bush and pulled a spray toward her. It is here I best remember her, and never do I smell the heavy perfume of the flower but there comes to me a vision of the perfect face and form of the girl as I dimly saw her, and I hear again her wonderfully modulated voice.

"John," she said, "if you hated a man what would you do?"

"You tax my ability to answer," I returned, a little startled and applying the question as personal to myself. "But I know what I ought to do."

"What?"

"We are taught to turn hate to love," I answered in self-protection.

"Love! There is no such thing! It is but a name for passion and selfishness."

"It has nothing to do with either," I returned. "It is but simple justice; it is a name for peace; it is that which makes the world move, according to Voltaire, and he was not burdened with sentiment. And I can quote a higher authority."

"You mean, I suppose——"

"You may suppose I mean the Scriptures—the New Testament. Yes, absolutely, I am weak enough to have found comfort in it when it is cleared of dogma."

"You are a strange man," she returned with a heavy sigh. "It is evident we breathe different air. Will you see me to-morrow? Come to-morrow and tell me of your uncle; I must know. And come in the

THE PLAN

morning; I have something to say to you. Will you—surely?”

I bowed and kissed the hand she held out, then we went on to the chaise in the road and she drove away after making me repeat my promise to go to her in the morning.

CHAPTER XIV

ACTOR AND ACTRESS

THAT night I made definite arrangements as to the manner of my uncle's supposed death. Every detail was arranged save the one relating to the time of the tragedy. Nothing could be done until a secure retreat could be hit upon, and this bothered me not a little. The house itself or any spot on the grounds was not to be considered. New York might be safe if he could once get to it, but even there, he might be recognized and the plan made abortive, as the news of his death would surely spread in that direction; and, moreover, he was not equal to the ride.

The following morning I should be obliged to go to Tryon Hall, according to my promise, and the day after go to Brouer's again. So long as the house was freed of the presence of my aunt there was no need for action, and it was finally determined to let the matter rest until there was an urgent necessity for taking the step; then, if worse went to worse, my uncle could pretend to have drowned himself and ride east to Greenport or Southold, though he was far from fit for such a journey alone, and the one road through the wilderness would be beset with dangers.

This much settled, I went to bed, and goodness knows I needed the rest, for I had become fagged in

ACTOR AND ACTRESS

body and mind. The next morning, with a cleared head, I started for Fort Neck. Minding me of the morrow's trip, I spared my poor horse by going the distance afoot, thinking more of the brute than of my own ankle.

The guard which had been established on the night of the raid was still maintained, but I was not under the necessity of encountering it, for Josephine was evidently on the watch for me, and met me before I turned into the grounds. Her face had lost a shade of its brilliancy, but she was beautiful past the telling. There was a question in her eyes as she held out her hand, and even before I saluted it I answered the mute interrogation.

"My uncle is no worse, at least. I felt obliged to inform you as soon as possible. I have kept my promise."

If I expected any emotion of pretended relief I was disappointed. The softness of the night before had disappeared.

"Did you stop the medicine?" she asked quietly.

"Yes."

"And he is no worse? That relieves me. But I did not ask you to come that I might continue to talk of the squire; it was you I wished to see. We will walk, if you are not too tired. I will take you home in the chaise."

I assured her I could walk much farther, and we continued westward on the broad and level road, she silent for a space, as though thinking, I wondering in what new direction her villainy was working. Presently she spoke.

"Do you know your cousin James?"

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

“No,” I returned, with my face trained to lying.

“It may be unbecoming of me, my friend, but I would warn you against him. You are soon to know him, I fear.”

“Ah!” I returned, as much surprised by her words as the fact they contained. “In what way is he to be feared? All I know of him is that he is an officer—a Tory; and am I not a Tory, too, by your advice?”

“Nevertheless, he is to be feared. I fear him. See!” she said, stopping and facing me in a sudden burst of apparent earnestness. “I am telling you what is known only to myself. He thinks I am his tool; he thinks he has me body and soul; he thinks I serve his cursed cause; he has one mission, and he will pursue it to the end!” She abruptly started to walk again, but now her words were vehement. “I almost told it to you in the arbor in your garden, but ceased that I might not make you dishonor your trust. Did you think to hoodwink me, my friend? I know much that you are concealing; I recognized your attempt to deceive me by acting, and now I ask you to confide in me that I may be able to give you the assistance I know I am able to give—that we may both thwart this man who is the embodiment of cruelty.”

I have averred that I am no coward, and here I repeat it, but I was never so frightened in my life as at that moment, when she frankly told me she knew I had been acting. We had advanced so far down the road that the old house in which I had been imprisoned was in plain sight, and that it had been turned into a temporary barrack I knew at once by

ACTOR AND ACTRESS

the smoke drifting from the long-unused chimney and the red coats of a number of soldiers who were lounging before the door. In an instant I fathomed it all, or thought so. She had read me in spite of my fancied powers. Last night had been a farce. She knew my uncle was much better than I had intimated, possibly she knew every step I had taken, and she had lured me hither that I might be passed into the hands of the squad detailed to guard Tryon Hall. All this passed rapidly through my mind; I think I burst into a cold sweat, and had we not been within plain sight of the soldiers, in my sudden rage I believe I would have struck the woman down and fled—and thereby have ruined myself. Though her words were rapid and her voice low, to me the thunder of a menace lay therein. Her smoothness was that of a snake. She would pretend to save me from motives of friendship; she would confess that my cousin was a villain (for just what reason I knew not, save it was to inspire confidence in herself), and then ruin me by my trust in her. As to my cousin's mission, I knew it only too well, but exactly what she wished me to confess, unless, indeed, it was to admit that I was aware my uncle's sickness was due to poison, was puzzling. To say something in return was imperative, but I think that though I guarded my words I expressed my sudden consternation in my eyes.

"And how do you know I have aught to conceal?" I asked, in a vain effort at ease.

She pointed her finger at me and fairly laughed.

"Your face, my thane, is as a book. You know the rest. Aye, and one wide open."

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

“Am I so simple, Josephine?” I returned, a trifle relieved at her mirth, and striking back with the only weapon I possessed. “You seem to have read me in part—why not in all? Are your powers limited? Read further and you may be startled. God knows my heart is bare enough, and there are things a man can not conceal from a woman.”

I think she caught my meaning as it was intended, for her face sobered at once and hardened a trifle.

“I have little to do with hearts beyond my own—which is troublesome enough. You are leading from the subject. You must tell me all I ask.”

“What do you ask?”

“To know what you know, though you deny the knowledge. Who is Annie Kronje?”

As she put the question I felt like a man suddenly relieved of a crushing load, for from it I became aware that my fear had been a shadow only. In my acting I had out-Heroded Herod, having bettered what I thought were my possibilities. She had not referred to my uncle; she had not suspected me, but through sheer nerve was trying to force from me all my supposed information regarding the woman who, by my cousin's own statement, was greatly bothering the British authorities. If now I denied my ability to enlighten her (as I had once done) I felt it would put an end to her patience and result in my final fall. She had accused me of acting; well, I would still act, seeing I had heretofore been successful. With the assurance that I was in no immediate danger, I felt an unholy glory in fencing with this magnificent woman—magnificent only in a material sense. I had struck when I had expected to be hit,

ACTOR AND ACTRESS

and with an ease that was as real as a moment before it had been assumed, I answered:

“You are asking much, Josephine. Admitting that I know who and where this woman is, I assure you, and I am not assuming truth, that I have never seen her. But my honor is involved in this. To what end should I tell what I know? What is to be my reward and what has my unknown relative to do with the matter?”

“To the end that you may fulfil your mission to her. To the end that we may thwart your cousin, who, to my certain knowledge, has been detailed to find her. For this purpose he is at present disguised as a spy. Give me this information, and I will guard the woman; I will place James Colt in your hands to do with as you like. It is a fair exchange.”

“It is evident that you do not love my cousin.”

“God forbid! But there are men who are terrible in their intensity. I fear him.”

“It is a fair exchange,” I said, thrusting at the opening she gave me; “save it is extremely unlikely that I shall ever meet him, and even then, I fancy I can protect myself. How stands it between Master James Colt and Philip Blair? Did I misunderstand the latter when he intimated your affections were engaged to him?”

She made no start as though confused, but in a manner the frankness of which might have undone a stoic she turned and stretched out her hands in an impassioned appeal:

“Nay—nay, my friend; do not temporize. If my affections are engaged he does not hold the key to them. Are you blind that you can not see I wish

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

to save you? What are these men to me? What do you wish me to say?"

"You devil! you devil!" was my mental ejaculation as I marked the unmistakable trend of her words and met her half-way.

"Josephine!" I burst out passionately. "What cursed fate brought me within reach of your witchery? Have you no mercy? Are you not strong enough? Give me time; give me time to think. Let me at least protect myself by getting at some plan by which it may appear that this information was not given voluntarily. Then will I claim a larger reward than you have offered. Give me time. Would you have my passion be my death?"

As I spoke, throwing my soul into my words, every trace of color left her face, but it came back, not as the blood comes to the face of innocence. With her it was a flag of triumph.

"Have you known me so long?" she returned, looking steadfastly at me.

"I have known you always," I cried with subdued ecstasy. "Let us go back. I am afraid of myself."

In this I spoke the truth. To lie at high pressure is exhausting, but to make love after the fashion I was doing taxes a man to his limit. I felt that if I were to hold myself at this height much longer I should break down, expose my studied hypocrisy, and end in defying her, which would be tantamount to ending my sphere of usefulness in this world. It is difficult, indeed, to pretend to serve two masters.

She turned with me, and we went back, the emotions aroused by my words being excuse enough for

ACTOR AND ACTRESS

a silence that was sufficiently eloquent. In the return walk she appeared to have almost forgotten me, though she kept so close, indeed, that our hands touched and I was again conscious of the subtle perfume that enveloped her. I did what I could to rouse her to make some remark by which I could get at the state of her mind. I exaggerated my limp. I spoke of the squire and his regard for her; of his sickness and the tremendous nature of my loss if he should die; I dwelt on the beauty of the sky and the sounds about us, and though she answered sweetly enough she gave me but monosyllables in return, and I knew she was in the deepest of studies. It was no better when she drove me homeward in the chaise. She appeared far in a fit of the blues, and did not offer to go to the house when we reached it. She gave me her hand to kiss, returning my warm pressure, and not until she had gathered up the reins to return did she allude to the topic I dreaded; then with a smile which had lost much of its original brightness, she said:

“I will not force you, John. You will volunteer to give me what I wish, but I shall not ask you again. I will put you to the test.”

And with this she touched the horse with her whip and drove away.

CHAPTER XV

ANNIE KRONJE

I CONFESS to having been greatly puzzled at the present attitude of the girl, though in it I saw cause for self-congratulation. It might be possible that her sorrow for my uncle's supposed condition was genuine; that she had repented of her hellish work, undertaken, perhaps, at the instigation of James Colt, whom she might well say she feared although she served him. On the other hand, it might be possible that the whole of her conversations, her actions, and implied softness were but parts of a scheme to subjugate me, as she had been ordered to do. That she was an adept at assuming a part was plain enough, and with satisfaction concealed under a guise of sorrow for the squire she was likely to be waiting for me to condemn myself. In either case I had won thus far, for I had saved my uncle's life, and, whether or no she intended to lead me astray, I certainly had hoodwinked her. With her implied intention of pushing me no further I became fairly certain of my position, and it was with something like a light heart that I set out for Joris Brouer's house on the following day. It was understood that should any one come to the house my uncle was to be found in a fit of delirium, while my absence was to be accounted for in a

ANNIE KRONJE

last desperate trip to Oyster Bay for consultation with the doctor.

I flanked the Jones house and the barracks as before, but it was well-nigh high noon when I reached Brouer's. He was evidently expecting me, for though his welcome was scarcely more than a nod and a vacant stare, a fairly good horse was put to a fairly good farm-wagon and stood hitched to the tree on my arrival. As the vehicle was one-third filled with hay, I concluded it was this I was supposed to have sold him, and I was right, for in a few words, the clearness of which was in sharp contrast to his lumbering manner, Brouer explained that we must agree to have disagreed as to its weight, and were about to drive to Jamaica that the question might be settled on the public scales, of which the village boasted.

Of Annie Kronje not a word did he drop, even when I questioned him; neither did he refer to our destined point beyond saying we were to go to Jamaica. I have known reticent men, but none to equal the Dutchman who clambered on to his load as though there had been nothing in me worthy of his attention, and who, with humped-up shoulders and pipe in mouth, looked to be half asleep. There was nothing for me to do but abandon myself to his direction, trusting that when knowledge became necessary it would be imparted.

He drove straight to the village, I riding after, and though I noticed a few soldiers, there was no sign of a great force occupying the place—a fact that surprised me—and we went up the street unchallenged.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

I was fairly well acquainted with the town. The most extensive building in it was the tavern known as "Hunter's," a long, shingle-covered, two-story structure fronted by a broad piazza and almost opposite the graveyard. To this house my guide drove, and hitching his horse to the long, well-gnawed rail near the coffee-room door went in with a glance that told me to follow. I nodded, and while fastening my animal, with a ready use of my eyes, I discovered that the lofts above the horse-sheds across the yard were occupied as a barrack, for from a window leaned two or three soldiers smoking and chaffing with some of their fellows below. Under the shed were two horses, one put to a chaise, the other with a side saddle, a piece of furniture that had but recently been introduced into the colonies. The long street was empty, and beside Brouer's wagon and the chaise not a vehicle was in sight. A great mass of recently cut wood was stacked along the highway and in the adjacent fields, by which I guessed Jamaica to be a depot for fuel. With these details gathered, I went after my guide.

The coffee-room, long, low, and dark, was almost deserted. Two officers sat near the open door playing "loo," but the advent of a couple of mere civilians like my Dutch companion and myself did not arouse their aristocratic notice. Beyond an uplifting of their eyes they took no action, and returned their attention to the cards and the coins on the table. No one else was near. Brouer pointed to a chair.

"Now you vaits here vile I settles dot bissniss in und jiffy," he said briefly, and went into another room, leaving me unsupported.

ANNIE KRONJE

My position made me a trifle nervous, for I realized that without any understanding on my part I had got into the British lines, although those lines had not been strictly maintained. I could hardly account for the laxity of the guard, nor did I know, until later, that our easy approach had been due to the sudden calling from Long Island of De Lancey's three battalions of dragoons and the non-arrival of Simcoe's brigade, which was to fill the vacated posts of Jamaica, Oyster Bay, Lloyd's Neck, Hempstead, and Flatbush. The present soldiery were but wood-cutter's guards and unacquainted with the inhabitants; thus I had not been looked upon as a stranger. Two days earlier or later I should have been stopped, as I afterward proved, and closely questioned; now, without knowing it, my luck was serving me.

But I was unaware of the conditions, and sat wondering what sort of a story I should tell if, perchance, the curiosity of the gambling officers should become greater than their interest in the game.

However, I was not put to the test. It was some minutes ere Brouer came back, and when he did he was followed by a tall, slim Yankee, coatless and hatless, whose black eyes swept the room at a glance. It took me a moment to recognize him as Hunter, the host—a man, so rumor had it, who was so hot for the king in the old days of the Boston "tea party" that he made a pot of the despised decoction and drank it in the open street, defying the little community to prevent. Before I had time more than to place him (so greatly had he changed) he walked up to me.

"The lady wants to see ye at once, young man,"

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

he said briskly. "I'll weight yer hay while ye are above. Come!"

Joris went out, but I followed Hunter into the hall. Pointing up the stairs, he whispered:

"First door to the right. Don't knock and don't speak to me when ye come down. You'll find your horse under the shed." Then he left me.

Obeying instructions, I went up-stairs and entered the room indicated. It was empty, but a door ajar gave me a glimpse into an apartment beyond, and hardly had I closed the one through which I entered before there was a rustle of skirts, the half-open door swung wide, and to my astonishment there swept into the room a young lady dressed for riding. I bowed low before I fairly recognized her, she courtesying in turn, but on recovering we both stared, each in astonishment at the other—I from the fact that I was face to face with Miss Romaine, the girl whom I had saved from the assault of the ruffian on the night of the raid, and she from a reason that was soon apparent.

If to me the situation was a trifle awkward, to her it was tragic. For all that I had seen her an inmate of a Tory house, not for an instant did I doubt the lady who stood opposite me. That here was the woman who, devoted to the colonies, was masking her identity under a false name, I did not question. I should have been more politic in my advance, perhaps, but it was without the shadow of a suspicion that I stepped forward and addressed her:

"Madam, I believe I have the pleasure of finally meeting Miss Annie Kronje."

"And so you have run me down at last, sir?"



The temper of the woman was clear.

ANNIE KRONJE

she answered, clenching her mitted hands, her pink cheeks turning white as chalk, her blue eyes wide open and shining.

"I have a greater pleasure than I anticipated," I returned, though I was astonished at my reception. "I hardly thought——"

"You hardly thought!" she burst out, the fear in her face giving place to hot anger, her paleness overcome by a flush that made her glow with beauty. "You hardly thought I should be trapped so easily. You hardly thought, sir, that when you met me I would do aught but quietly surrender. You hardly thought that there could be but one ending to this."

"Madam," I put in, now thoroughly astonished at her attitude and a trifle irritated as well, "had I known the manner of my reception I might have been better prepared. But I must follow my instructions; I have but little time to waste."

"Your instructions, sir! I fancy I know them well," she returned bitterly; "but whatever happens to me you will never follow your instructions. Had you wanted me you should not have come alone. I thought you knew me better. Sir, if you call out or attempt to leave this room I will kill you!" And with a quick movement she whipped a pistol from the folds of her skirts and covered me with it.

The temper of the woman was clear; the glow on her cheeks, the fire in her eye, and the way her red nether lip gathered under her white teeth showed me she was not to be trifled with. So startled was I, so overcome by the suddenness of her act and the malevolence of her face, that I stood and looked at her without moving. Some seconds elapsed; then she said:

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"What headlong reasoning led you to believe you could make an easy prey of me? Did you think I was spiritless? Answer me, sir."

"I can swear to your spirit, madam," I returned. "And if——"

"If me no if!" she interrupted fiercely. "Turn your face to the wall. How long is it since Captain Colt took to making war on women?"

Her question startled me like a shot, but with it the matter cleared. The business was plain—so plain, indeed, that together with the sudden relief which came with the knowledge of my having again been taken for my cousin I laughed aloud, though my common sense and the girl's face forbade me making any movement that might be misconstrued. At my mirth she stamped her foot in anger and was about to speak, but I forestalled her.

"But, madam, I am not James Colt. I am John Chester. I——"

"You lie, sir!" she interrupted. "Oh, the folly of it! Do I not know you have been on the track of Annie Kronje—you and others? How did you find me out?"

"Through the regular channel, madam. By instructions from Governor Clinton through Governor Trumbull and Major Tallmadge I left New Haven to communicate with Annie Kronje for the purpose of acting in the capacity of a confidential officer. Let me repeat, I am not Colt."

"You are!" she returned vehemently and without lowering her weapon.

"I am not."

"Hold out your left hand, sir," she demanded.

ANNIE KRONJE

I did so.

"Pull up your sleeve."

I obeyed, and she took a step forward to look at my outstretched hand.

"Where is the anchor you used to wear there, James Colt?"

"You are taking me for my cousin," I returned. "He still wears an anchor pricked on his left wrist. I have been damned by my likeness to him, but I am not James Colt. By order of Major Tallmadge I led the company to Judge Jones's house the night he was captured, and, madam, though it may be unbecoming in me to recall the fact, it was I who that night saved you from the man who was about to rob you. Do you not remember? I came under further and secret orders to obtain money from one Annie Kronje, which money I am to carry into the American lines. If you will permit me to speak at length, I will satisfy you that I am as devoted to the cause as you. Still cover me with the pistol, if you please, but allow me to be seated and hear me through. My risk is as great as yours."

It may well be supposed that I said this in a whisper, and, for that matter, at no time had either of our voices been raised, even when the stress was greatest. The girl hesitated a moment, then, as if uncertain, though willing to be convinced, she pointed to a chair away from the door, and lowering the pistol, though the hammer was raised and her finger still hooked the trigger, she said:

"I will trust you so far. Roxy!"

Her call brought in a negress from the adjoining room, a woman whose presence I had not sus-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

pected. She was of immense stature, and her brawny neck and arms, her free, manlike stride, and the proportions of her waist showed a strength that matched her size. The average man would be but as an infant in her hands, and yet for all her muscular power she showed later that her vital force was low.

"Lock the door and stand by it," said the lady. "Now you can proceed, sir; you need not hesitate to speak before the slave."

I did not fear the negress if she did not, and very much as I had told my story to the squire, very much as I have told it here, I related every event of the time elapsing from my meeting Colt in the Assembly tavern to the present. I knew well enough that the girl's own safety lay in her believing my tale, for, if she questioned it when I had done, if she still looked upon me as a fraud and took action against me, it would end in her destruction, for I determined that I would not fall a willing sacrifice to her possible stupidity, even if I was obliged to make a violent break for liberty.

Thus, to protect us both, I made a clean breast of my doings, aye, even of my thoughts. If she was what I took her to be she was but a pretended friend to the Jones household, and without reservation I went from the cipher letter to the attack, to my capture and liberation, to my subsequent deception of Josephine Cowan, and so through the history of my uncle's illness and my present dilemma regarding a safe retreat for him. Not a sentence that would bring strength to the narrative did I curtail. The matter of time ceased to be an object to me for the changes that came over the countenance of the girl,

ANNIE KRONJE

as I went from point to point, gave me courage to continue and spurred me on like uninterrupted applause.

In the knowledge that I had found a kindred spirit I felt a sense of security such as I had not known since setting foot on the shore of Smithtown Bay; nor was this sense decreased by the presence of the gigantic black, who, throughout my story, stood like an ebony statue at the door.

My listener scarcely spoke in the hour or more it took me to rehearse the incidents of the past few days, but the changing expression of her mobile face showed me that she not only followed my words, but lived in the moods that fitted them. Before I was through the pistol had been returned to her pocket, and as I arose on ending, she did the same, advancing with both hands stretched out to me. I bowed over them as I had over the hands of Josephine, but now there was no hypocrisy in my heart, only unalloyed admiration for the beauty and bravery of the woman.

"I am convinced, sir," she said, with a suspicion of moisture in her eyes. "I frankly own my mistake. You deserve all the reparation I can give. And now do you know what you must do?"

"I am in your hands, Mistress Kronje," I answered.

"I have usually concealed my identity, sir; but you shall have a confession. My name is Marian Livingston Romaine. Not a living soul knows me as Annie Kronje save such confidential officers as I have before met, Joris Brouer, and now yourself, and of course, Roxy. Not even Governor Clinton

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

knows that the ward of General Robinson, for such I am, is the supposed Dutch girl who acts as his agent. The original Annie is dead; I simply use her name. I know I may trust you. But what you must do is to get your uncle into a place of safety at once. Take him to Brouer's at the first opportunity. I will insure his reception. I have one instalment of money for you now. You will go to Brouer's on your next trip, for I do not think it safe to bring you here again. Were you an officer on parole it would be different. I dare not keep you longer; Simcoe may come at any moment. I can tell you much more, and will when I see you again."

Without giving me time to answer she went into the adjoining apartment and returned with two flat leather bags stuffed with coin.

"Here are one hundred pounds; take them and go. Be careful in their hiding, for there is hardly a hearthstone on Nassau that has not been turned in search of concealed gold. God be with you, sir. You have made me ashamed of myself; and yet I could not have known. Is there more I can do?"

"Nay, madam. It is enough that I am to see you again," I said, touching with my lips the white hand she held out to me. "The day after to-morrow, if it will please you; my poor horse will need rest."

"Nay, it is too soon, sir. Give me a week. I can not gather the money at once."

"A week!" I exclaimed. "I had counted on being in Connecticut in but little more! So much might happen to confound me in a week!"

"Ah, you fear Josephine," she answered, laugh-

ANNIE KRONJE

ing lightly. "And yet I can believe you play your part as strongly as she plays hers. I pray Heaven you have not practised on me! See with what faith I have accepted your story!"

"Madam, I fear I am but a poor liar. Moreover, I feel it might be nobler to be an open enemy."

"Sir," she answered, knitting her fine brows, "are you striking at me and the only service I can render my poor country? Know, then, that there is as much honor, and frequently more bravery, in acting a part in defense of a principle as in openly and hopelessly defying a foe, thereby cutting short one's usefulness; and undoubtedly there is more wit required. I would that this war might be settled by a battle of brains instead of bullets."

"God forbid that I should cast a reflection on your devotion, madam!" I answered. "But you have taught me a needed lesson; that——"

"That falsehood can be made to forward truth," she interrupted, her face clearing and her smile returning as she again held out her hand. "Next week, Mr. Chester; and I will to-day make arrangements for your uncle. Good-by and God speed!"

I accepted the dismissal, bowed low, and so left her.

What relation Hunter bore to the secret I could not guess, but he stood behind the bar as I went through the coffee-room; nor did he appear to notice me. The officers had gone, but at the table which I had occupied before the interview there sat a man looking from the window, his back to me, and the sight of his shoulders sent the blood to my heart. A man's back may be as full of character as his face,

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

and unless my eyes were playing pranks they rested on the figure of Mr. William Chandler, who, all unconscious of my presence, was looking into the yard I was about to cross, a pot of malt liquor before him, a newspaper in his hand. Had our meeting been elsewhere I would have settled our differences at once, but now too much depended on secrecy; I was in the enemy's country. I dared not stop. I dared not speak to Hunter. The only thing I could do was to traverse the yard to the shed, and, keeping my back to the coffee-room, ride off, trusting I should not be recognized.

And this I did, my cheeks tingling with excitement and my movements so self-conscious that they were enough to excite suspicion in any one who saw me. But I had evidently escaped recognition, for when some time later I ventured to turn my head I discovered that I had not been followed by my quondam friend; neither had a redcoat been sent after me.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RUSE

I LOST little time in wondering at the advent of Chandler in Jamaica. It was enough to know he had escaped chastisement at the hands of Hawley, and as for his continuance on Long Island, it was probable he realized the danger he ran in returning to New Haven. With the feeling that I had evaded his notice, I let my thoughts play on a pleasanter subject—that of the brave girl I had left. Greatly I marveled at her temerity in meeting me in the enemy's country, for the moment forgetting that her very rank—the ward of the Governor of New York—would tend to make her, as Cæsar's wife should have been, above suspicion. Her beauty was as manifest as her spirit. If Josephine Cowan might represent the night and its sensuous moonbeams, the face of the girl who had taken the place of Annie Kronje was typical of the day—the open warmth and glory of the sun. So I judged them, at least. I had never seen a shade of pure womanly tenderness on the face of Josephine Cowan, not even when she had sobbed. An emotion like contrition might have been expressed, but never that subtle something which in woman man calls weakness, but which is in reality her strength. Yet the face of Miss Romaine had shown pity at the story

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

of a stranger; her eye had moistened, though behind her softness lay unquestionable bravery. There had been no toying on her part, no attempt to avert a danger by coquetting, neither had she been crushed by surprise. Her honest ugliness of purpose had leaped to the front, and fear had not overcome her reason. She had not the glowing quality of the meteor, but if she did not possess the steadiness of a star, I agreed with myself that I was far out of my reckoning.

I thought so long of her that I was nigh turning into the road leading to the Jones house, and I pulled myself together with a laugh. My thoughts had not strayed from my uncle in this fashion for days, and it was with something like a sneer at my lack of good sense that I redirected my course.

I had enough to stimulate me when I arrived home, for there was my aunt again. I came upon her in the hall. She did not refer to our parting nor tell me where she had been, but her face was pale and pinched with fear, and from my uncle's room there was coming a series of shouts that told me he was perfectly aware of her presence and was again simulating delirium. I pulled a sorrowful face at once and persuaded the lady to go to her room, telling her that the doctor gave me no hope—that undoubtedly her brother had become insane from long illness. She shrank back in horror when I hinted she might see him and ran up-stairs, thus relieving me of the necessity of much more fine lying.

To me the end of my troubles seemed close at hand, for with the readiest acquiescence the squire agreed to go to Brouer's as soon as the horse I had

THE RUSE

ridden was ready to travel, and the last details of his escape were planned that night. The thing I most feared was that Josephine would come the day following, and I had no wish to meet her again until it might appear that the old gentleman was dead. Of the two of us he was by far the most buoyant in spirits, and the idea of the journey seemed to fillip his returning strength. His impotence to wreak immediate vengeance on his sister and her son was the only thing that seemed to trouble him, and far from wishing that Miss Cowan would remain away, he hoped she would come in time so that, while in a state of pretended frenzy, he might give her a taste of his energy. It was fortunate, perhaps, that a protracted storm prevented the lady's advent, else, I fear, he might have overshot his mark, but storm it did, and wildly, for three days, and on the afternoon of the fourth I was ready and Josephine had not appeared.

I had sunk the gold in the ooze of the inlet which, like an irregular canal, penetrated the land to within two hundred feet of the house, burying it beneath the little dock or landing. The sailboat had not been hauled into the water that season, but its tender floated by the little pier, and a square-ended punt was brought alongside that it might serve in the coming deception. Then I bid Prince take the second horse to the woods and tie it at a certain spot, though the brute was so nearly useless that I doubted its ability to carry the old gentleman to Jamaica, but it would serve for part of the distance, at least.

Leaving minute instructions with the black, I started down the road as though going to Jones's. It was about five o'clock in the evening, and the

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

storm had cleared both sky and air, though the heat had come again with the passing of the tempest. I rode along for a mile, then turned my horse into the swamp and made my way back to the woods in the rear of the house, where I found the miserable animal Prince had brought. Here I stopped and waited for darkness, and the wait, in my impatient frame of mind, was a weary one despite the fact that I had enough to occupy my brain.

I wondered what Josephine thought of my apparent neglect of her after my last passionate outbreak. It would have worried me more had I not considered that I was nearing the time when I might put all fear of her aside. But a little longer and I should be free to return to Connecticut. With my uncle in safety, I might enjoy the fruits of my labor, enter the army (perhaps as an officer), and await the issue of the war, which, from the recent successes of the Americans, to me seemed, at no distant day, to be sure to end with our independence.

The bright dreams of healthy youth are proverbial; and, indeed, hope is one-half of success, but little did I guess that my activity had hardly begun; that the dangers I had passed through were slight compared with those which were to follow. As I lay on my back on the moss that evening, and with my hands clasped behind my head, looked at the soft sky that showed between the trees and waited for darkness, I think the only regret I felt was that I should not see Annie Kronje for several days. To Josephine I gave much thought, and wondered at the strange coincidence that had brought the two women under the same roof on the night of the raid

THE RUSE

—two opposites in character and purpose, to each of whom I had been intrusted with a message. In their beauty and spirit they were alike, in all else different. In them were contrasted light and darkness, peace and war, love and hate, while I, like a shuttlecock, had been battledored between them, protecting one, conciliating the other. I had grown sick of deceit, though without knowing it I had but gone through the preparatory school. As with me, so with my poor country; both were yet to pass through deep waters.

It was nine o'clock and the woods had grown black when I left my concealment, going back to the house afoot. Like a thief I crossed the road into the jungle of the garden. I was well satisfied to note that a light was burning in my aunt's room and another in Nancy's house, and with little fear of interruption I went to the study window.

Both the squire and Prince were on the watch, and after passing out his well-filled saddle-bags my uncle followed in person, being lowered by the negro, and then with a last whisper to the slave, I supported the old gentleman back to the shelter I had left. I was more than pleased to see how firmly he walked, and realized that nothing had been lost through the delay caused by the storm.

And thus my uncle fled from his own home. In the garden he stopped and looked back at the house, swearing a great oath as he shook his fist at the light in his sister's room, but having yet to get out of the woods, both metaphorically and literally, I urged him away.

The ride to Brouer's was uneventful except that in order to save the squire's horse from dying on the

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

road, as he seemed likely to do ere we were half-way, and thus exposing our flight, I changed him to my saddle and went afoot myself the rest of the distance, leading the staggering brute.

It was two o'clock in the morning when we arrived, and I knocked up the inmates of the house, thereby creating the utmost consternation. But our reception was warm, and the phlegmatic Joris opened his doors and his heart in a manner that showed me his past coldness had been due to his great caution. Now he gave me his confidence, and in the course of an hour I got further into his good graces than ever would have been permitted on our old footing. The relation of the ward of Governor Robinson, one of the lights of the social world, to this humble family was made clear by Joris, who, with a tender dignity, informed me that the original Annie Kronje had been his own *schotse* or sweetheart, and that she had died on the eve of her wedding-day. Her mother, Joris's aunt, had been Miss Romaine's nurse, and the two girls had formed a close friendship which had never been chilled by the broad social gulf that stretched between them. Miss Romaine was as much at home at the Brouers' as at her own house, and much more free, I fancied, from the descriptions of her pranks and sayings.

The Brouer household consisted of Joris, his mother, and his sister, the latter being the one who had passed the funeral wine. I knew her by her square figure, which was in sharp contrast to the infantile prettiness of her face and clearness of her complexion. Though the tinge of recent sorrow lay on the family, they made much of the squire in their

THE RUSE

homely Dutch way, and I had no fear of his discontent in this haven of safety, unless, perchance, his stomach rebelled at the style of fare and cookery to which he was so unused.

It was not until the following noon that I started back, leaving the crippled horse to be disposed of in any manner Brouer saw fit. Like all my journeyings heretofore, the trip was uninterrupted, and the reception I met with at home was reassuring. It was late afternoon when I turned into the grounds and saw my aunt coming toward me in a pucker of haste, her hands aloft, her hair, loosened from its comb, streaming over her shoulders. Behind her came Miss Cowan, and though there was no hurry in her walk, her face betrayed a state of mind which was not to be envied.

I knew what was coming, but never could I express the jumble of words and exclamations that greeted me. So incoherent was my aunt that I turned to Josephine. There was nothing frantic in her explanation. Her manner was one of profound grief, or, better to express it, of abject hopelessness, and yet so vivid was her description that there was almost an element of reality in it. It was plain to them that the squire had killed himself early that morning. Prince, she said, had left him in the night for a moment, quiet and apparently sleeping, but on his return both bed and room were empty. The print of the squire's heavy pumps were struck deep in the earth beneath the window from which he had evidently jumped, and his tracks were traced to the boat-landing, the low-tide mud showing he had ignored the pier and taken a straight line from the

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

turf to the dingey, which was missing. The negro had at once alarmed my aunt, who had sent him down the inlet in the punt, in the meanwhile despatching Nancy for Josephine. On the shore the women had waited long for the slave's return, and when finally he came back with the empty dingey in tow there was every evidence that, with the method frequently attached to madness, the squire had made way with himself. The negro had found the boat drifting on the open waters of the Great South Bay. The oars had been securely stowed. The squire's mud-covered shoes were side by side in the stern, and on the thwart were his coat and hat, the first neatly folded. There was considerable water in the boat, as though it had been shipped when the old gentleman stepped on the gunwale to plunge overboard. It was evident that he had got into his clothes the moment Prince left the room, and in the dark had escaped observation. It was not until daylight that the tracks had been discovered, so he had ample time to get away. In what part of the great sheet of water lay the body of the old gentleman it was impossible to guess, the boat having had several hours' drift.

I can not say I experienced any elation as I listened to the details I myself had planned, and which had been so faithfully carried out. In fact, I was so conscious of a sense of disappointment that I felt no joy at the recital. Whether or no I had caused grief or only surprise or consternation I can not fairly state, but surely I had caused suffering, and I felt anything but heroic as I stood with my face turned from the lady, as though I would conceal the effect of the blow, when in reality I was hiding a counte-

THE RUSE

nance into which I could not throw the aspect of sorrow.

I dared make no answer that would cause me to look at the face of the speaker, and knowing the overwhelming nature of the news would excuse my abruptness, I went on as though in haste to reach the house, and so placed myself beyond the reach of scrutiny. For my aunt I cared nothing—a child might have hoodwinked her; but the astute Josephine was a person I was loath to encounter—the person in whom I felt lay my only danger. But I was far out of my reckoning in this.

For two whole days I kept in my room that I might be free of the annoyance of meeting any chance caller who might be brought to the house through curiosity, and for the purpose of avoiding Miss Cowan, for that lady now rode over every day as regularly as though the ordering of the household had devolved on her. And doubtless it needed direction, as, from all I could get from Prince, my aunt kept to her own apartment as religiously as I kept to mine. I had fears that the military authorities would favor me with a visit, but they held aloof, as though the matter were of no moment, and, indeed, to them it probably was not.

On the morning of the third day I went downstairs to the library and found that my aunt had emerged from the depth of her grief, for both she and Josephine were sitting cheek by jowl on the floor looking through the papers that had been taken from the strong box and lay about in little piles. I felt mightily resentful at this piece of impudence, but as no good would come of a protest, I took what sat-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

isfaction I might at the confusion I caused by suddenly appearing before them.

But Josephine was equal to the situation. With more hauteur than she had lately shown she arose, brushed the scraps from her skirts, and said that Mrs. Colt had requested her assistance in going over my late uncle's effects, that when I recovered sufficiently to take an interest in affairs I might find them in order.

"We have found the will," she concluded in the most matter-of-fact way; "and he leaves everything to you."

"And James is left penniless, and so am I," interposed my aunt, casting a malevolent eye on me as she struggled to her feet.

"Do you think me less generous than my uncle, madam?" I said, not caring for a scene. "You shall not suffer from any act of mine. And of what use is a will in a country where there is no civil law? At all events, I do not care to consider the matter at present."

I left the room, and as I feared, Josephine followed me. Together we walked to the garden, the lady silent at first, and I talking to keep her from putting awkward questions. But it was of no use. She waited until we had got abreast of the summer-house, where she faced me in the abrupt way which I had learned to know meant something.

"Do you remember what you told me, John?" she said, laying her hand on my arm in the old devilish, insinuating manner, a manner and touch from which I now recoiled. I arose to the occasion.

"Perfectly," I returned. "Are my words no

THE RUSE

more than my breath? Have you remembered them? Did you interpret them, Josephine?"

She made no reply at first, only leveling her black eyes and looking at me searchingly.

"And do you remember what I said to you?"

"You asked me to place my honor in your hands."

"And you have not trusted me."

"Who will guard my honor if I will not? But the question was settled unknown to me. Josephine, Annie Kronje is dead."

"Dead!"

"Dead a year ago. I had succumbed to you. I had but come from a search for her when I heard the news of——"

"Yes—yes," she interrupted. "But who was she? What did you learn?"

"Save that she was the sweetheart of a Dutchman and died a year ago I know no more than you. There are various rumors about her. What I know I discovered in Jamaica."

"And who was the man?" she asked carelessly, pulling down a branch by her side with one hand.

I had told her nothing of importance, nothing from which she could make capital, or which might lead to the discovery of the present agent. But I did not like her searching questions. She was getting on dangerous ground. It was for me to deny further knowledge in the matter, and I grasped her free hand and caressed it as I told her my interest had not extended in that direction. I had considered myself in a dangerous position, and got away as hurriedly as possible.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"And were you within the lines?" she asked quickly.

"No," I replied easily, for I recognized that my fate might hang on my answer. "Jamaica is not occupied at present. De Lancey's force has gone."

She leaned toward me and almost smiled. I caught the warmth of her breath as she asked:

"And now what will you do?"

"What will I do?" I returned warmly. "Is my dishonor all you care to direct? Is my reward for this only a cold question?"

"What would you have?" she asked, turning from me. "I have discovered nothing."

"But I have risked much."

"Risk more if you value a reward from me. It is no risk if Jamaica is deserted. Go there and find the man. Some one has taken the place of Annie Kronje, and is in danger. I would save that person. Can not you understand? Then claim your reward. Did I not say I would put you to the test? Is the price not worth the play, John?"

She bewitched me for the moment, and yet withal I hated her even while I recognized that she had given me the chance I wished for—to go again to Jamaica without creating suspicion.

"I will go at your desire. I will do all I can. And then?"

"Ah, you will see," she returned, placing both hands in mine. "I dare not tell you all my object in this, but it is more than you dream. It is to save you, John. Be on your guard. When will you go?"

"Within a day or two."

THE RUSE

“Well, may God go with you, my friend. And now let us talk of something else.”

And we did talk of something else, for I was glad enough to drop the subject. Indeed, never during the ensuing few days did she allude to my errand except to ask if I had yet set a time for “going forth,” as she expressed it. As the week drew toward its close she appeared slightly nervous for one of her stamina, but I did not guess the cause of the war she was inwardly fighting.

Not a day did she miss coming to the house and inquiring for me openly, as though she held a claim on me or feared I would suddenly disappear. There was a settled melancholy on her at this time, but it was not of the sort to lessen her beauty or entirely crush her spirits or depress me who was her almost constant companion. I thought it but natural that she should shrink under the great red spot on her guilty conscience—another woman would have cowered beneath it; yet, withal, her nature seemed to open and show a warmth that might well try a man—any man save one in my position. I freely admit that had I not known her as I did I would then have gone helplessly in love. As it was, I allowed her to think, if she cared to, that I had fallen into that one form of idiocy which is either a bane or a blessing. And yet I was careful not to go too far; not to focus the matter. She might interpret my looks as best suited her, but my words were devoid of foolishness, and I thought her nervousness might arise from the fact that I took no advantage of my opportunities to put my implied worship into definite form.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

But there were times when the demon of passion possessed me and bid me reach for her, trust her, risk all for her, and that was when she lifted up her voice and sang. It might be at the water's edge with the south wind and the firm rhythmical stroke of the surf as an accompaniment; it might be in a savanna of the woods where every bough and leaf and blade of grass was a harmonic string; but without warning she would stop in her walk and begin to sing, sending out such a flood of melody that the world halted to listen. I never heard such a voice. The power of it lifted me like a strong hand. She commanded all moods. She was wild or tender or mocking, as pleased her, and I oft fought with myself, as though possessed of a devil that must be cast out. It is well that God gives to no woman a knowledge of all the power she holds over man; it is enough for man to know it. At these times I would conjure up the face of Miss Romaine (or Annie Kronje, as I called her to myself) and use the image of the clear-eyed girl as a foil to resist the attacks of the siren, but it was of little use; the meteor blazed, the star only glowed. Aye, but when the meteor vanishes the star still shines.

CHAPTER XVII

MARIAN ROMAYNE

THE heat of the summer of 1778 was terrific. Even on the wind-swept coast of Long Island the sun blasted like fire and herbage shriveled in the fervency of its rays. The nights were made bearable, as a rule, by the ever-recurring sea-breezes, but of late even these were but spurts of air that seemed born only in time to die.

My journey to see Annie Kronje was a distressing one both to myself and my horse, but as I did not attempt to conceal my going or promise a speedy return, I took the trip easily. The apparent death of my uncle had not changed matters greatly, for the remainder of the household settled into its new groove easily enough, and I took care that things should work smoothly, having not much more mind than to get what money I could from Miss Romaine and run away as fast as possible thereafter.

My aunt, under the influence of Josephine, I thought, had become as gracious to me as a vain and ignorant person can be to one who's enmity is felt rather than expressed. I might lie my prettiest to the elderly lady, but might never have deceived her into thinking I bore her any affection. My mind revolted too strongly. It was a comparatively easy

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

matter to tell and act a falsehood to Josephine—there was war in that; but I seemed to belittle myself in lying to my aunt.

Yet now she wore her thin smile perpetually, spoke her commonplaces in a voice to match her peaked nose and tight blue lips, and even expressed a fear that I might be sunstruck or have something worse happen me. “Must you go?” and “Why?” and “How long will you be gone?” and “Are you sure you can stand it?” and such like, until I began to think there was something in the wind, and bade Prince keep an eye open during my absence. I thought it strange, too, that Josephine would not let me call at her house, absolutely forbidding it, and always coming to mine. There were several things that were matters of considerable consequence (now that I look back at them), but they appeared trivial at the time. The night before I started I was walking with Josephine by the light of the young moon, and for a moment or two I could have sworn we were being followed by some one. Again, the next morning, I fancied I was being dogged by a horseman whose figure I caught sight of in the distance, but as he never overtook me, even though I stopped often to let him, I concluded it was some wayfarer who had turned off into a byway.

I saw the squire that day, and he looked so like a Dutch *schout* in his new rig that it was laughable. He was a good deal bored at the flatness of the hours and lack of occupation, but made no other complaint. His wrath waxed hot when I told him of the freedom that had been made with his papers by my aunt and Josephine. But it was my meeting with Miss

MARIAN ROMAYNE

Romayne that was the feature of the trip, and not until she had told me that I was to see her no more did I become aware how deep had been my interest in her; that it was she and not my mission that had given life to my journey.

I had bowed over her white hands, I had received her congratulations on the success of my ruse to free the squire, and in return I was paying those pretty compliments of the day which may mean little or much, when she stopped me, telling me that she had brought great news, and news that called for action. We were alone in the room where once had laid the dead body of Killian Brouer, but now, though the windows were thrown wide to the hot air, the half-drawn shutters admitted only enough light to reveal the high bed closet or *betste* and quaint Dutch furnishing of the interior. The girl came close to me, as though she feared the motionless whips of the willow without might hear her, and said:

"I have two hundred pounds for you, but the word I bring is of more weight than the gold. Clinton is about to relieve Pigot at Newport and will draw off the French fleet in order that he may throw reenforcements into the town. Sullivan must be warned. I have sent one message, but doubt it will reach him. You must take what money you have, get to Connecticut, and report to Governor Trumbull. If this were not reason enough for you to leave Long Island there is another, and one more personal. Captain Colt is back. He called at headquarters two days ago."

"Did you see him?" I asked.

"He made himself odious," she returned, with a

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

slight flush. "How little he guessed what he was doing—he was talking to the very woman he once tried to find. But you will go?"

"Not from fear of him, at least. But am I never to see you again? Is Miss Romaine to be as dead to me as in reality is Annie Kronje?"

"This war will end some day, doubtless," she replied, looking at me with honest, wide-open eyes; "then we may meet. But are you sure that Annie Kronje is dead?"

"I have your word for it!"

"Oh, but I was stupid to tell you so. Wait here; I will bring you the gold."

She ran from the room, leaving me alone; and somewhat depressed, I stared out at the blazing landscape and cursed the exigencies of a service that might mean no more than a few thanks given officially, a great deal of danger—and little else. Never would I admit to myself that the news I had heard was affecting my spirits, but it was while I was moodily chewing the cud of bitter reflection that the door opened and Joris's sister entered. She bore a tray on which was a glass of wine and came up to me, dropping a heavy courtesy as she presented it. The pretty, close-hooded face topping her hulk of a figure was attractive enough. I threw her a light compliment, and not to give the blue devils too ready a control of my spirits, I drank to the health of the fair Bertha, and then, with a sudden impulse, placed my hand beneath her round chin and kissed her red lips. My reward was a smart slap on the cheek and a low exclamation. The pink deepened to scarlet, the hood flew off, and as a mass of chestnut hair tumbled

MARIAN ROMAYNE

about her shoulders I was astonished to find myself face to face with Marian Romaine. For a moment she looked at me, her blue eyes blazing.

“My faith, sir! And are you in the habit of distributing your favors unasked? or is Annie Kronje to be less respected than I? Lord, that a man I have seen but twice should know my lips! You compliment my powers as an actress, but—but—how dare you? My fingers tingle for another stroke!”

Had not her twitching lips belied her fury I would have been abject in my humility. Indeed, I was sufficiently abashed, but I retained enough self-possession to answer:

“Madam, I beg ten thousand pardons. I merely made a mistake. I am innocent of wrong to Miss Romaine; I thought it was Bertha, but I will take another stroke—at the price paid by Annie Kronje.”

At this she broke into a peal of laughter.

“I hardly know how to construe your regrets, sir, but I will not give your boldness a further chance. Annie Kronje has had a hard experience.”

“Then let her protest since she alone is offended. Why should Miss Romaine pick up the cudgels for her?”

“But it was Bertha, sir, you thought to offend.”

“I thought to offend no one, madam. But bring Bertha here; I warrant she has no charge against me.”

“O Lord, sir! Your wit is too sharp for me. You defend yourself with a ready tongue. This comes of my pride. Have done and forget the matter.”

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

“Nay, madam,” I replied, as I stooped to pick up the fragments of the glass which I had dropped. “It was a dear experience to me. I shall treasure it for its rarity. From to-day I am devoted to Annie Kronje.”

“Verily, sir, you have shown your devotion, and ’tis time that Annie put herself beyond danger; and—and—you will be careful not to refer to this before Miss Romaine. You will presently find her with Squire Emberson. Her mask has been a questionable success.”

She ran out before I could reply, leaving me fascinated by the witchery of her voice and glance and not without a keen appreciation of her tact and good sense in managing an awkward situation. When we met an hour later, of the two I think she was the more self-possessed. No reference was made to the late episode, which to me was so great, and my slight embarrassment gave way before her ease.

We were obliged to keep close to the house for fear of creating suspicion, for though the Governor’s ward might visit the home of her old nurse without arousing curiosity, it would not do for me to be seen too openly.

It was fortunate that at this time the sense of security of the British on Long Island was at its highest. The people of Kings and Queens were thoroughly subdued (or appeared to be), and the attention of the invaders was confined to the north shore, which was strictly guarded (though often fruitlessly) against the numerous small expeditions sent from Connecticut. In effect, the war was dragging, and the interest of the general public was turned to

MARIAN ROMAYNE

Washington, who had set himself down again at White Plains and appeared to threaten New York, and the French fleet, which was playing at hostilities with Pigot at Newport. This was fortunate for me, as the withdrawal of De Lancey's troops to oppose the patriots in Westchester had left but a handful of the enemy on Long Island, and inland matters demanded little of their attention. However, I was sufficiently near Jamaica to require circumspection, and I kept out of sight of the road, over which a squad might chance to pass at any time.

For the most part I remained in the house, and from Miss Romaine learned many things. The heat, which grew with the hours, might have been unbearable had not my mind been taken from it by my companion. We sat in the broad hall, the lady, my uncle, and myself, the great waves of fervency rolling in on us with wilting effect, but its power seemed lost on Miss Romaine, who, in a light dress, rocked and lazily waved her fan as she told us something of her life, something of the great events of the time, and much of her hopes for the political future. There was to be a ball at the Governor's house in Hanover Square within a few days, she told us—one of those oft-occurring functions with which the British whiled away the tedium of inactive military life—and at this one, to which most of the notables had been invited, she hoped to learn much, and regretted (though not half as much as did I) that I would not be available to transmit her information. She told how she had become a ward of Governor Robinson; how the old man had petted her in her girlhood, and how he had made good the adage that there is no

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

fool like an old one by asking her to mate her twenty-two years with his seventy. She treated the matter as though it was an open secret, and laughed lightly as she recounted the fact, leaving out details. It was more a joke than aught else.

History has told us of the silly amours of the royal Governor of New York, who was in his dotage when appointed to that high office; how he preferred children for companions; how he relegated to others or neglected his official duties, how he drank his wine and cracked his senile jokes in public with a coarseness that would not be tolerated at this day; but history never hinted how that idiotic octogenarian obtained his immense influence at court.

Though open as the sun, the girl never forced herself beyond a certain reserve. That we were both orphans was a bond of sympathy between us, but I needed no such bond. I listened to her with but half-concealed admiration, for her beauty alone commanded that. The light of her blue eye, the red of her lip, the maddening attractiveness of her smile, and the way with which she poised her head were enough to make a man fall before her even when putting her qualities of heart and head aside. The squire fell openly, and as frankly the girl accepted the flattery of his praise and directed her conversation to him, ignoring me, for the most part, for the reason, I thought, that I had done what I conceived no mortal man dare do—I had kissed her lips.

When I left the house late that night and started back homeward I was fairly heart-sick from a longing I was too great a fool to understand, and the

MARIAN ROMAYNE

spirit with which I cursed the war and its necessities had more selfishness in it than principle.

The moon had gone down when I started on my lonely ride and the night was very dark. It mattered little to me. My thoughts lay behind me, not before, which is a sign of age or weakness, and the blackness that all but obliterated the white strip of the highway under the feet of my horse chimed in with my spirits well enough; I was indifferent to the gloom.

But I thanked the depth of it when I was nearing home, for as I was walking my well-nigh useless animal the stillness was ruffled by the rattling of hoof-beats, and presently there came on the hot night air the jingling of cavalry accouterments, and I was conscious of the rapid approach of a squad from the direction from which I had ridden. Thoughts of having been followed came to me, but I put them aside as impossible, and turned my animal into a field, where I dismounted and laid my coat over my horse's nose that he might not neigh and betray my presence, for to be discovered abroad at such an hour would have been a matter demanding full explanation, while the gold on my person would have damned me.

The oncomers swept past like the wind and I could hear the heavy panting of their steeds. The darkness hooded their number, but I guessed it to be about ten. Not a word was spoken as the squad went by, and I made a shrewd guess that they were bound to the temporary barrack, the building in which I had been imprisoned. Nothing else on the road could call them, but why they should ride at such a pace at such an hour was beyond my ken.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

As the drumming of hoofs died away I again betook myself to my saddle and jogged on, letting my brain drift back into its melancholy way, and so reached home some time about three in the morning.

Greatly to my surprise the day did not bring Josephine, and right glad I was of her absence. My aunt was effusiveness itself, and fluttered about like a gigantic black moth until about noon, when she told me she would walk over to the Fort Neck house and see if Miss Cowan was ill—indeed, she might spend the night there, if I did not mind. Her solicitude in my behalf and the unusual way in which she capered around me reminded me of the tale of the affectionate donkey, but I managed to keep my temper and bade her good speed on her short journey, telling her that if I should by chance be absent the next day she need not fear for my safety. For the next day I hoped to be far on my way east, and was well pleased that she would be off the premises while I made my last arrangements. My hint at absence fetched her up short, as though she was surprised, but when I told her a bare-faced lie to the effect that I would be back within a few hours she appeared content and went off. In no way could I account for her sudden change of temper, and asked Prince if he had seen anything suspicious. He said he had not, and that no one had been there since Miss Cowan, so I was left to muse over a matter the animus of which I saw clearly enough later.

But before the next day I knew I could not leave until the day after (unless I essayed the matter afoot, which was impossible), for betwixt the continued heat and his unusual journeying, the horse was not

MARIAN ROMAYNE

fit to carry me a mile, and needed prolonged rest. This irked me greatly, for the business on hand was serious and my own safety far from being assured. I thought hardly of my luck, but the finger of fate is invisible. I knew nothing of its kindly direction. Had my horse been in good condition my tale would not have been worth the telling; my life, as I now look at it, would have been a blank.

As there was nothing else to be done I sank the last instalment of gold with the first and tried to philosophize myself into a state of patience. The next day brought no Josephine, neither did my aunt return, and while I thanked Heaven for the fact, I wondered why the former lady had so suddenly withdrawn her interest. Two days of absence was unusual and perhaps portentous, but it gave me small concern, for I noted with great satisfaction that by the next morning, Tuesday, my horse would be in shape to take me off some miles at least.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

BUT the day I looked for never dawned for me. The eve of Tuesday was suffocating; the air was quiet as that of a tomb. There was something sinister in the aspect of land and water. It seemed as if nature were holding its breath when the sun went down in a brassy horizon. There was not a fleck of cloud to relieve the gray-blue dome of the zenith, which seemed to lie close to the earth, like a hot blanket. The great bay was as flat and colorless as glass and reflected the hopeless look of the heavens. Along the shore there was a faint lapping, as though the expanse breathed heavily and stirred the sedges as its breast rose and fell. The dust I kicked up in my restless and aimless wanderings neither drifted nor settled, so heavy was the air, but lay a low, tawny cloud, and the smoke from my pipe hung motionless in the stagnant atmosphere. Common noises were muffled, but so still it was that a bee in full flight shot past me like a musket-ball, its hum still reaching my ear when the insect had gone far on its way.

I had been moody all day, strangely thinking of Miss Romaine and the ball to which she might be going that very night, for aught I knew; thinking of my uncle and the flatness of his present life as com-

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

pared with mine, beset with dangers, and, yes, disappointments. I thought of Josephine and her rage when she should finally discover that her intended victim had not succumbed to her wiles, but had escaped. She would then guess the worth of my stories; she would then know she had met her match.

I had four regrets—that I must leave Prince, that I must leave my uncle, that I was not to see Miss Romaine, and that I would not have the pleasure of facing my cousin and meting out justice to him.

At early candle-light I went to my room to pack my saddle-bags, though I determined to let the gold abide where it was hidden until after dark, when no prying eye could follow me. I half stripped myself to get relief from the closeness of the room, and the single candle that had become necessary burned dimly, or as though the quality of the air was that of a foul well. Prince was somewhere about the place, probably asleep. The general stagnation seemed to have penetrated my bones, though not in a way to quiet me. I grew fairly frightened at the horrible and unnatural silence, the prostrating heat, and a something that hung over me like a black and heavy cloud. To break the spell I worked in feverish haste, and soon got my small belongings into shape. I was about going down-stairs to hunt up the negro, more for company than for aught else, when it came to me that I might make a master-stroke by writing out the translation of the cipher letter and having Prince place it in the hands of Josephine after I had been gone a sufficiently long time to make such an action safe. It was an impulse, pure and simple, and a foolish one, perhaps, but I acted upon it. I threw

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

my traps from the table to the bed and squared myself to write. It was no hard matter to remember the missive word for word, and when I had finished I directed it to J. C., and signed it "James Colt, *alias* Philip Blair," adding, as piece of fine wit:

I was not blind; I only played at blindness.

I played the fool (you'll grant a fool was played);

I played at love—

And there I stopped, for I suddenly became aware, how, I know not, that I was not alone in the room. I had not heard a sound, but was impelled to look over my shoulder, and so looking, saw a British officer in undress uniform standing in the doorway, his arms folded over his chest, his eyes bent down on me, his mouth half smiling, and I recognized my cousin James Colt. He was clean shaven now, and for his features I might have been looking at myself in the glass.

I leaped to my feet, stuffing the writing into my pocket as I did so. For a moment I thought it was an apparition due to the heat and my peculiar mental state, for I had borne him in mind while I was writing, but I was at once undeceived. His sardonic smile broadened as he marked my recognition, and he took a step into the room, changing his whole attitude in a way that showed me that he had probably been watching me for some time. The ease with which his arms dropped, the left hand falling to the hilt of the sword at his side, the right catching by the thumb to the belt into which was stuffed a pistol, showed me also that he considered himself well backed, and was unobtrusively calling my attention to the fact.

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

"And how does Mr. John Chester like the change from Elysium to hell?" he said, breaking the silence and laughing easily.

"How did you come here?" I asked, standing still and breathing hard.

"How else but through the door? May not a man enter his own house without knocking? And so you were going away? I am fortunate in catching you. Is this not a pleasant surprise?"

I was too dumfounded to answer, though my brain was by no means so befogged but that I saw the straits into which I had fallen. This, then, was the threat that had hung over me all day; a dumb warning, the signs of which I had been too gross to read. The air was cleared now that the cloud had lifted.

"You are my cousin, I believe," I finally returned. "We resemble each other strongly—in the face; you also remind me of one Philip Blair." He laughed as though I had joked.

"You know the trite saying that all's fair in love and war," he returned, lounging up to an easy-chair hard by the door, though his eye never left me as he seated himself. "And you were so willing to be a tool—so simple! It has been quite delightful; you helped me wonderfully. However, I have little time to waste. Tell me where you have hidden the proceeds of your visits to Annie Kronje that my men may get them."

"Your men!"

"You had better know the situation at once, perhaps," he said, in his old slow tone. "Look from your window. The house is surrounded. You are

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

a prisoner, charged with being a spy. As to the result of the latter, it is not for your cousin to say—the courts will settle that. I do not desire to harrow you unnecessarily.”

The steadily burning candle showed a glint in his eye, as though he was restraining himself. I stepped to the window. The moon, half-grown, gave but little light, but there was enough for me to see that two soldiers stood in the garden, though not close to the house, and I presumed there were others elsewhere. It looked hopeless. I had no weapons other than my bare hands, while the hedge surrounding me was quickset with arms. As I turned from the window my unwelcome visitor said:

“My virtuous cousin will thank me for the liberty he has had for a month, but as our colors are not the same, he can not blame me for curtailing his term of freedom now. I am but doing my duty. You are surprised possibly; but war is war.”

“I am not surprised save at your sudden appearance,” I returned, with a tightening in my throat. “I have known your stripe long since.”

“Good!” he observed easily. “That will expedite matters; I hate hypocrisy. And how have you become so informed?”

“Have I not seen Annie Kronje?”

“Ah, yes. To be sure. And you have been aware——”

I interrupted him.

“I have been aware that you were plotting against the life of my uncle and against my life; that you hoped to get at the personality of Annie Kronje; and that you were a spy. Not until I discovered

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

Chandler rifling my pockets was my suspicion strong enough to cause me to act; but to good purpose I acted then, and learned what a self-confessed villain you are. What is your motive to crime?"

His face broke into a flame of fury, but he controlled himself as he replied:

"Motives differ in different men, my simple cousin. Yours would be mine were our positions reversed, I have no doubt." He bit his lip. "I make no professions to being kind-hearted. To the man of sense the world is an enemy. You accuse me of several matters. Well, to be frank with you, and I can afford to be, I admit the impeachment. It is better so, perhaps. As for you, you were in my way—the old man was in my way. What care I for the opinion of a dying infant like you? As for spying, you will admit that I have been fortunate. You will get your deserts."

"Pray God you may not have yours, for you have murdered your uncle," I retorted.

He looked at me steadily for a moment, and I could see the effort he was making to restrain his gorge.

"Your words are not fine spun, sir," he returned, paling with anger and rising to his feet; "but as frankness seems to be a virtue you insist upon, let us have it out. Motive! Why, you smooth devil, I had you preached to me by that demented fossil until I sickened of you. Motive! Let my necessities stand for my motive. Have I not won? However many slips there have been, I have not miscarried. The old fool has gone, and by his own hand—not mine; you are a prisoner, and Annie Kronje will be——"

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"When you find her," I ventured, casting about for something to use as a weapon and seeing only the chair, the back of which he held in his hands. The table was too heavy, the other furniture either too cumbersome or too far removed from me.

"Annie Kronje! When I have her!" he exclaimed. "Why, you ass, she is almost within my grasp! Did you think I do all my work through such as you?"

"Perhaps Josephine Cowan——"

"Leave her out! leave her out! We will not discuss that lady!" he exclaimed, his words and manner growing forcible. "But as for Annie Kronje, your gold-gathering Dutch girl! Do you think I travel on a one-legged horse? No, by the mark! It matters little how Chandler failed with you, for he found the lady."

"You lie!" I blurted out.

"Ah, do I so?" he returned, gradually losing his hold upon himself. "Why, you lumbering idiot, do you think I know not that Annie Kronje and Marian Romaine are one and the same? Sir, I have taken you, and will break no secret by which you can profit when I tell you that the Brouer household was arrested last night. Marian had gone, but she will be taken. Aye, by God! taken and disgraced in public!"

"At the ball?" The question was involuntary.

"At the ball?" he mimicked. "Yes, at the ball to-morrow night; and, by the Lord, she'll find her level, for I will be there. But of the two I prefer you, you sneaking puppy, you example of virtuous

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

duplicity. It was you who beguiled the squire into injustice to me. Now you have it all."

As he spoke the last word his sword flashed from its sheath. I never dreamed that mortal man could leap from apparent calmness to such uncontrollable violence. He had thrown off his mask. Each word he spoke seemed to feed his spleen, and at last all reason left him. His triumph was fairly shouted, and he was beside himself with a rage which he now made no pretense at curbing.

To me heaven and earth had clapped together and all things were at an end. Of Brouer I gave no thought. The only glimmer of hope I had for my uncle was from the words of the man standing before me—he still thought him dead. My own position faded for the moment as I considered Miss Romaine and the terrible and undreamed of danger that was approaching her, the unknown whereabouts of the squire and the ruin that menaced him. But it was the image of the brave lady that stood out the stronger of the two. I fairly choked at my impotence to either act or answer, and the gold-laced devil before me seemed to read my thoughts as easily as he had kept track of my doings.

"Hark you," he said, his teeth bared by a side curl of his lip which made him look like an angry wolf. "It may please you to know, as it pleases me to tell you, that it was you who gave me trumps to beat Marian Romaine. Chandler saw you at Hunter's, and suspected in his turn. He has left you to me. The screws were put on mine host and the cat was out of the bag. Was it not simple? Was it not neat? Get your comfort from it."

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"Where is your mother?" I asked. "Will she second this outrage? Has she known aught of your intentions?"

The question seemed to cool him, for his rage gave way to a laugh as hard as flint.

"The old lady is a better tool than I dreamed possible," he returned with less violence. "She has kept me in touch with you—oh, yes; excellently. I have just left her. You need hope for no rescue through her."

"And is Josephine——"

"Leave her out, damn you! Leave her out, I say," he suddenly vociferated.

"Very well," I returned, bracing myself for the only chance I could see. "Let us be frank. Can you be bribed?"

He laughed.

"Not by you, you beggar! What you wish is here." He tapped his chest. "I fancy you will die without issue. Why should I make terms when I hold all."

I tightened my grip on myself—and the only calmness about me was in my voice and face—certainly not in my heart, which was now flying.

"And Miss Romaine?"

"Faith, are you struck by that damn witch? What of her?"

"Faith, in turn," I answered, trying to anger him again. "It must be that you are scorched in the fire and are still sore. Yes—yes—she told me how offensive you were at your last meeting. What will become of her?"

"Of her? I know not and care less. She'll be

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

stripped of all property and be hanged, perhaps; imprisoned anyhow, unless Sir Henry, who has an eye on her, gives her liberty on his terms. In which case the Badely will fall. By the Lord, I would it were that way!"

He laid his head back and laughed again, a hard laugh, his bare throat showing above his loosened coat collar. Before or since I never hated as I hated at that moment the man who drew the picture of a woman's degradation. His insult to the girl put a sudden fire in me. Without the slightest warning, with the fear of consequences far from me, and moved by an impulse that seemed to come from without, I fairly leaped on him, closing over his windpipe with both hands, my thumbs sinking into his flesh.

We were about equal weight, but in youth and activity I was more than his match. I tip the scales at upward of twelve stone, and my body, hurled at him, as it were, when he was fairly sure of his position, took him unguarded. He staggered backward, his eyes opening wide, as though in wonder (as well they might), a raucous sound coming from his gripped throat as he tried to cry out. He struck at me with his bared sword, but the short reach saved me from the blade, the hilt only cutting into my scalp as it came down. I did not feel the blow then. As the sword went up again his legs caught on the chair. He tripped and pitched backward, his head coming in contact with the wooden acorn that topped the bed-post. The ornament broke off at its thick stem and flew across the room from the force of the blow, the ready blood spurting from the temple of the falling man even before he reached the floor, to which he

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

dropped heavily, I still fastened to him with the tenacity of a bull-dog. In a second I found he was senseless, and whipping the pistol from his belt with one hand, I seized the sword with the other, and jumped for the hall.

No one was there, thank God! Then I ran back to the window to mark if the noise had reached the squad without, but the heavy air had deadened the sound of the scuffle, and the two men still stood like statues at the farther end of the shrubbery.

Ten seconds before I had had no plan of escape, not even a hope. I had felt a rising, an overpowering desire to close with the man who had trapped me, but it was more an impulse of anger than the furtherance of a plan. Even as I turned and looked down on him my mind was a blank so far as future actions were concerned, save only that I should fight to the last, for hanged as a spy I determined not to be. Colt's tall figure lay in the gloom at the end of the bed, his breathing a peculiar snore that indicated concussion of the brain. I took the candle from the table and bent over him, my ear tuned for any sound from beyond the door. As the light brought out his pale face and closed eyes I fairly started back. Thus would I look in my own coffin; thus would I soon be—lacking even the breath—if I could not get beyond the net surrounding me. This appeared hopeless, but even as the darkness settled light came to dispel it. I saw my chance—a bold one, but the last—and realizing that I had but little time to act and none to lose, I turned the unconscious man over and stripped him of his brilliant uniform as quickly as I could shift his unwieldy bulk. My only possible

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

opening was to play his part for the moment, and, taking advantage of my close resemblance to him, get through the cordon about the house. I did not look beyond the coming fifteen minutes.

The sweat was pouring from me and my breath came quickly as I got into the clothing which might have been made for me so far as the fit was concerned; even his spurred boots felt easy. We had been cast in the same mold physically, but not morally, thank God—not morally. By the time I had belted on his saber and topped myself with his plumed hat I had pulled myself together sufficiently to know that I could not leave him in his present condition and hope to get much of a start in any direction. His return to consciousness meant an immediate alarm. Believing the guard would hardly dare interrupt their officer, and being ready to meet them if they did, I hastily cut the bed cords and bound the unconscious man hand and foot, then making a wad of the towel, forced it between his teeth, tied it securely, and dragged him on to the fallen mattress. Then I went out, locking the door behind me.

Even as I passed down the stairs I had no plan. I knew that something must be said to the petty officer who undoubtedly patrolled the front of the house, but I trusted to an inspiration, for my head refused to work at that moment. I can not truthfully say that I felt light-hearted at my prospects, but I can fairly state that I was not now controlled by fright. I was excited (which was natural enough), but I was no longer cursed by the sense of hopelessness I had experienced when I first discovered my cousin's presence.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

As I reached the front door I saw three men standing in the faint shadow of a tree a few rods away, the moonlight just showing their figures. I must go by them whatever happened, and I stepped out hastily, only to find my way barred, for at that moment Josephine Cowan ran around the corner of the house and confronted me before I could descend the steps.

Her face was pale but filled with animation, and she was breathless from hurry. And yet she was cool. I can not describe the mingled determination, haste, and yet passionless air she bore. She wore no hat and her long dress was lifted that its folds should not impede her steps. In a quivering voice, the like of which she had never used to me, she asked:

“Have you taken him?”

“Yes,” I said shortly, making to pass, for I had a sudden fear of her, and my heart almost tore itself loose with thumping as I marked this new and terrible danger.

“Stop!” she exclaimed, throwing up her hand and swinging herself before me, at the same time glancing toward the men under the tree as though to gage their distance. “Where is he?”

“You must not interfere,” I replied hoarsely, looking into her eyes as I backed away that I might be in the shadow of the hall, and wondering if I would be compelled to do violence to this woman.

“Must not!” she exclaimed, taking a deep breath as she followed me and drawing herself up in the way I knew so well. “Must not! Is it for you

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

to dictate to me, sir? This thing can go no further. You will let this business drop, James Colt. I shall no longer be a party to it. I have come because I can not stand the strain."

In my astonishment at her words, I had not the wit to formulate a reply, and happily for me, she looked for none, for pausing but for breath she continued:

"Listen to me. You sent to me a man who, through the hold you had upon me, I agreed to wreck; and I entered into the spirit of it with all that devil in me you know so well. I am not weak, James; I am as strong as you. When I pleaded for your cousin to-day I gave you the wrong cause for so doing. It was not that I regretted from fear. No; I lied to you. Listen now to what I dared not say then—to what, at the last minute, I have summoned my courage to make you hear. I have followed you to tell you that what I began in hate I ended in love. He overcame me, not I him; oh, the shame and the glory of it—and in barely a month! I played at first, and then became real. Do you mark me? Defying you, I tell you I love him—I love him! Am I not plain? Is this not maidenly? I tell you I fear his displeasure more than I fear yours. The contrast between you is complete in all but looks. You have dragged me down; he has lifted me. You played on my devotion to my king and the strength of what I thought and what you thought was my affection for you. He opened my eyes. His was the same face as yours, but it masked a different soul. He worked for principle, you for gain. Now even my affection for you is dead! Mark me well. Even my respect for you

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

suffered when yesterday you demanded that I should beguile from him the hiding-place of the money he had gathered with unselfish devotion to a cause he thinks is right. How vile! What a coward I have been! You shall not make him a prisoner. Let him go; let him appear to have escaped, else, as God is above me, I will spread broadcast that which will ruin you, though it ruins me as well. What have I to fear? What have I to live for? Naught but to do battle with a guilty conscience and a hopeless affection. And what can you do? You know me now for what I am, not what I was. I am going to him, and you beckon your destruction if you prevent. Let me pass."

CHAPTER XIX

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

IF my life had hung on my speaking at that moment I think I would have forfeited it. My tongue was paralyzed, as was my whole body, for that matter. I looked at her like one in a stupor, and yet my brain was working like lightning. As she spoke her earnestness grew, but it was not until toward the close that she seemed to forget herself, and then her words, though low, shot out with an abandon that nothing can describe. She was a lioness at bay. I had wrung love from a stone.

If ever woman was magnificently beautiful in pose, face, and gesture she was as she stood in the half light and discovered her passion. It was not a confession as from her to me, and for the moment, in the mingled feelings of shame and sorrow that took possession of me, I failed to see the way so suddenly opened. I was but an eavesdropper in effect. I experienced no feeling of triumph as I realized that I had but to stretch out my hand and possess this girl. As she ceased speaking and gathered up her long skirt to pass me—indeed, she did pass me—back upon me rolled the sense of my present peril and I saw what would be likely to happen if I allowed her to find Colt and there discover what she had done.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

Beyond this there was neither forethought nor resolve in my mind. It was through instinct alone that I acted. I sprang to her and caught her about the waist, drawing her to me and pressing my lips to hers ere she could resist.

“Josephine! Josephine! Do you know what you have done? Do you know what you have said? Heaven has leaped from hell! I am John—John Chester!” And I dashed my hat to the floor that she might better see my face.

She ceased her struggles and threw back her head to get a look at me, her eyes growing wide, then she twisted from my embrace.

“My God!” she faltered, pressing both hands to her heart. “Is it you? Is it you? How came you here?” She peered at my face, her own changing from sudden wildness to passionate pleading as she fathomed my disguise; then she impulsively held out both arms to me. “You know me now! Oh, for the love of heaven do not hate me, John! Forgive me—forgive me. I tried to right a wrong. I did not dream—I am better than I knew. If you have pity in your soul, if you love me as your eyes have told me, help me on. Oh, my God! How came you here—and thus?”

As she came close the devil took possession of me, and I seized her and answered with a kiss. Thus for one moment we stood in silent embrace, though my better nature revolted at the gigantic lie I was acting. I felt like a poltroon. It was she who first tore herself away.

“Where is he?” she asked in a whisper, her body trembling as though it was she who was in danger.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"I turned the tables on him. He lies, tied hand and foot, in my room," I ejaculated, coming to my full senses.

"Oh, my brave boy! And you were hurt. There is blood on you!"

"I did not know it. It can be nothing," I returned in a fierce hurry. "But I must get from here at once."

"Yes, yes; they will suspect if you wait too long. Hurry out and tell them that he is not here; that he has gone to Tryon Hall; that I saw him and came to tell you."

"And you?" I said.

"Have no fear from me."

"Is there a sergeant in the squad?"

"No; only a corporal and seven men."

"Are they mounted?"

"No. O John—John! How can I let you go? You will come back?" She held out her arms in impassioned appeal.

"Yes, yes," I said, as I saw the avenue of escape and made for the door, forgetting her sufferings in my own plight.

"Corporal!" I shouted.

The man came up on a run. I gave him no chance to speak. "He is not here," I said hurriedly. "Miss Cowan tells me she saw him crossing the fields to Tryon Hall. Take your men, go back, and surround the house, but do not attempt search until I arrive. Away with you, and lose no time by sparing yourself. A pound to the man who takes him if he is caught on the road!"

My instructions were comprehensive and the fel-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

low bright. He threw a salute and was gone in a flash. I heard his call a moment later and saw the men go through the garden on a double-quick.

"Now you must follow them," I said, turning on the girl, who had sunk to the settle. "It would be your destruction to be found with me."

"Must I leave you with him?" she asked doubtfully.

"There is no other way."

"You will not kill him?"

"God forbid! His punishment lies not with me. I have but to carry out a plan of which I must not tell you, Josephine. You know my hurry. I will bless you forever, for twice I owe you my life. You will trust me?"

"Have I not trusted? Have I not given all? And you have promised to come back."

"And I will, please God!" I returned, almost cursing myself for my necessities. For back I determined to come, though not the way nor for that which she expected. It would be when the war was over, for little I thought it could be before.

"I will not hamper you, then," she said, with a great longing in her voice, as she held out her hand and turned toward the door. "Some angel led me here and made me speak—the same good angel that will protect us both. Oh, but I hate myself! I am not worthy of your love. Tell me you forgive me!"

"Is this a time for words, Josephine?" I asked, fearful lest she should demand the one lie I dare not utter, though I was ready enough to act it. "If your heart acquits you what need of lip-service from me? Do not my actions speak? Come."

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

A sob choked her voice, and like a child she clung to me, this girl who had been typical of strength, whom I had thought a devil. Ah, well. Though love is childlike it is stronger than Satan himself.

And thus we hurried down the garden path to where her horse was hitched, one of her soft hands in mine, the other lifting her long riding-habit, a costume I had never seen before. The dress made her wonderfully tall, hatless though she was, and there, under the half-moon and almost within sight of the man who hated me, she bent from the saddle and for the last time held her head low that I might kiss her lips—a kiss which to-day burns as I think of it. God! how I despised myself that for fear of my paltry life I was deceiving a woman who was struggling toward the light! When she awoke to know me hell would be merry at her return to it. And would the fault be mine or hers? I knew not then and I know not now. Certainly I lost no time in regrets, for as I realized it was impossible for me to kill my cousin, so, in the same measure, had it become imperative for me to warn the girl whose fortune, reputation, liberty, and perhaps life, hung on her knowledge or ignorance of her danger, and there was no time to lose.

I had planned to rescue her, and yet it was no plan. The matter of it had leaped at me even as I listened to the woman who had but just received my kiss, and when I turned away from Josephine she went from my mind almost as completely as from my vision, though that was not immediate, for I watched her until she was lost in the gloom.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

Then I hurried to find Prince. I was in no enviable frame of mind at this juncture. I felt I had outraged both myself and the girl, who, I had no doubt, would have stood by me or fled with me and faced all had I but hinted at the desire. She was no weakling. She was greater than I had dreamed, not for having fallen before me, but through the outleaping strength of her womanhood and her defiance of danger.

I found the slave asleep in his quarters, neither himself nor Nancy having been disturbed by the invasion, so quietly had the soldiers come and gone. When they first saw me the red uniform threw them into a panic, and when I finally got Prince away and in a few words told him what had happened, I thought the fellow would faint from fright.

And yet it was Prince who helped me from my predicament, for I knew not what to do with my prisoner. To leave him in the house might mean his ready rescue should his mother appear, a contingency likely to occur at any time. This would mean a hot-footed pursuit of me. I recoiled at the idea of killing him, for it would have been no less than cold-blooded murder, and to hide him on the place would be anything but a safe procedure, as he would soon be discovered.

"Why not take him to the swamp?" said the negro.

"Impossible; he is too heavy," I answered, chafing at the passing minutes.

"Den hitch up the ole coach an' drag him dere. De old coach-wheels ain't set yet. You pulls him dere, Mass' John, den onhitch de hoss, take it, an' go.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

Nobody won't know 'cept me, an' I ain't no fool niggah."

The solution of the problem flashed on me at his words. I might thus get a start of forty-eight hours. Colt would not perish within that time, and if at the end of it Prince appeared to have found and rescued him it would save the negro of complicity in the matter, a thing much to be desired, as the rage of the villain would be boundless, and unless the slaves were cleared of suspicion it might cost them their lives, for I could take neither of them with me.

I at once leaped at the suggestion, and bidding the negro to throw the saddle into the old vehicle told him to get it before the door as soon as possible. Then I went up-stairs.

Colt lay as I had left him, but his breath was now coming less raspingly, though a quick inspection showed him to be still unconscious. The air of the room was heavy with foulness, and the candle guttered out as I held it over him. I might have had his weak heart to thank for my easy conquest, nor would it have troubled me much had it ceased to beat altogether, though it was not for me to stop it. Seeing he was safe, I hurried out to the barn and helped Prince harness the horse, though I had some doubts of the ability of the animal to move the cumbersome trap. But it moved fairly well, though with loud protests from its greaseless wheels, and in a few moments we were ready.

Glad enough to find the negro might assist me without being recognized, together we carried the senseless man down the stairs and put him in the

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

vehicle, the teeth of the slave chattering from fear as he laid hold of the body, though I had bound Colt's eyes, lest he should open them in transit. With a brief farewell to Prince I mounted the box and without explaining my purpose, but telling him to find and liberate the prisoner on Wednesday night and not before, I left the slave trembling like a sail swung in the wind, and drove off.

I was aware the horse could not pull far and dared not let him use all his strength in the effort. I got on to the road and went east slowly for perhaps half a mile, then turned from the highway, gained the rear of the swamp, and backed the coach into it until the wheels sank to the hubs and became immovable in the morass. It was a small open spot, and the moon lit the space, though the forest lay black about it. Here I cast loose the horse from the coach, saddled, and tied him to a tree, then went to Colt and removed the bandage from his face.

The air had brought him to his senses, for his eyes were open and their baleful light showed a helpless hatred that was unfathomable. I have seen a snake pinned by the neck bear such a look. It was almost as though he had freed himself and struck me, his glance was so malignant.

"I see you have revived," I said, as I marked his condition. "As you stated an hour since, 'war is war.' Under the circumstances you can hardly blame me for my action. You should not have come to my room alone. I might easily kill you and have nothing but my conscience to blame me, but am yet too simple to do murder. You will not suffer here. Doubtless you will be found and liberated in time,

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

and it is that time I wish for. You might profitably employ some of it in thinking over the past."

Though he was speechless, owing to the gag, his looks were eloquent enough. There is little glory in torturing a fallen enemy, and I was only too ready to get away from his malevolent aspect. I saw that his bonds were still fast, shifted him to a sitting posture, and bidding him a sarcastic "good night," left him and swung myself into the saddle. "Now for a maiden brave," I said, as I drove in the spurs, and I am afraid I said it too loud. The horse leaped at the prick. I was off—off to where a week since I would have trembled at the thought of going. James Colt was to appear at the ball by proxy.

Beyond that I had not speculated, but I felt the hand of the Almighty beneath me, and, for the present, at least, had no fear. Pity it is that we trust when all goes smoothly and tremble when the way grows rough. We are but infants spiritually; we do not believe what we profess and teach.

The way grew rough for me shortly after I had passed over the first ten miles, for my horse threatened to give out at any minute. I would have been more fortunate had the squad that came to capture me been on horseback, as doubtless I would at this time have had a reliable animal under me. I was fairly sure that I had been the object of the cavalry detachment that had passed me two nights before, and thought with regret of the useless horseflesh that was now probably tethered in the great field by the barraek. Had I not advanced so far I might even have tempted fate and further tested my disguise by turning back and demand-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

ing the mount of the officer whose personality I had usurped.

However, fortunately or not, I can never tell, I went on my way, walking part of the time until two miles from Jamaica, when the animal fell to his knees with a groan almost human, struggled up, fell again, and died in the center of the road, his bulk looming in the moonlight like a small mountain—a finger-post pointing the direction of my flight.

It had been my intention to flank Jamaica, as I knew I would be barred at the first guard unless I had the countersign, British officer or not. The great dread arising from uncertainty now took possession of me. Something like fear gripped me, and for the moment I came near becoming panic-stricken, forgetting the trust I had preached to myself but a short time before. Despite the heat, I cooled suddenly. The world narrowed to Jamaica and the road I was on, and in this universe there was but one man, one woman, and myself; one man close behind me bent on my destruction, one woman whose fate rested in my hands. How night and fatigue will dampen the spirits!

This state of mind did not obtain for long. As action was necessary I trudged on, the movement relieving the strain upon me. Within a mile I had reobtained my grip on myself, reaffirmed my belief in the power of right, and so went on to my fate, whatever it might be. Even under the tension of my nerves and my preoccupation I soon became aware of the exhausting quality of the heat. The closeness of the air was suffocating, albeit the hour was verging on the late, the confinement of a military coat no

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

longer to be borne. I stripped the scarlet thing from me and threw it over my arm, and as I did so a number of papers slid from the inside pocket and fell to the ground.

For an hour or more I had known of the existence of documents of some kind within the captain's uniform. In a vague way I had thought that I might profit by some possible information which they contained, but as the darkness at that time would not permit of their perusal, the matter had passed from my mind until the moment they slipped from the pocket.

CHAPTER XX

ALIAS CAPTAIN COLT

As I stooped to pick them up I again became impressed with their possible importance. It appeared as though they had forced themselves on my attention, but it was impossible to read a word in the uncertain light of the moon, over which had passed a fine haze—an impalpable net that portended a change of weather at no distant time. Stronger and stronger grew the feeling that I should know their contents, and equally strong grew the realization of my foolhardiness in attempting to enter the town on foot and at near midnight. But where could I go? Brouer's was out of the question, and there was not a house between me and the village, even if I had been willing to risk myself under a strange roof. It is true that I might have turned back to some outlying farm, and, on the strength of my uniform, taken the first horse I could find. I had thought of it, but my mind revolted against such an outrage to an innocent party, as it had revolted at the idea of killing the man who was only too ready to kill me. The complex problem became simple when I concluded that I might pass the remainder of the night in the fields, absorb the contents of the papers in the early morning, and in open day enter the lines as a British

ALIAS CAPTAIN COLT

officer unhorsed by accident; the patrol would be less strict after sunrise, but whether or no, I must procure a horse.

There were no woods in which to hide, no thicket other than swamp land, but here and there throughout the wide and level meadows was a fruit-tree, and under one of these, some distance from the road, I sought shelter.

I think I must have slept a little, for the sky was aglow with the coming day before I had fairly closed my eyes, I thought. As soon as it was light enough to see I went through the clothing and took an inventory of the contents. Besides the papers there was loose change amounting to about ten shillings, also a woman's lace handkerchief, probably a relic of some amour, a pen-knife, an elaborately chased snuff-box which I immediately recognized as having belonged to my uncle, a pair of men's sleeve laces, a perfume sachet, and a pad of rouge. Truly my cousin had foppish tendencies, and as a key to his character the outfit was valuable. The papers, though interesting, and in a sense important, gave me none of the help I looked for—that is, I then saw no way of utilizing their contents. There was a long letter from my aunt telling of my home-coming, and another describing the death of the squire. In the latter she gave a description of my character, a description not flattering to me, which ended with the information that she had misjudged me at first, but found, on acquaintance, that I was “a boy of no force and easily managed.” There was nothing to show that she desired my death. There was also the squire's will (which fact was no surprise, my aunt probably

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

having taken it), an invitation to the ball at the Governor's house, and a note on perfumed paper from a fellow officer who proposed their going together and asking for a rendezvous on Tuesday evening.

It was signed "Rothwell." I gave it little thought, but the name clung to my memory. A letter in which the writer prayed for the return of his loan of fifty pounds, as he was in extremities, and another from a colonel whose name I could not decipher and in which was declined the captain's bill of hand for one hundred pounds for two months, gave me an idea of my prisoner's financial status. But the most important writing of the whole set was a letter recently penned by Chandler, for it was signed "Will C——," telling of seeing me at the tavern and giving a history of his subsequent doings. It appeared that he had stayed at Tryon Hall for a space, which accounted for Josephine forbidding me to go there, as it accounted for my feelings of having been followed. He told of his suspicions anent Annie Kronje, and bid him (Colt) hurry back as soon as possible and get a detail to capture Annie and "the man who has the money." There was also a proposition to capture and divide the money without referring it to the authorities, and the missive closed with the advice to keep the identity of Annie a secret until after I had been arrested. It struck me as I read this, that, acting on the suggestion, the gold was the motive that prompted my cousin to go to my room alone, that there might be no one about to hear me confess its hiding-place. I think he anticipated an easy conquest over the "boy of no force," and expected to obtain possession of the money as readily

ALIAS CAPTAIN COLT

as he had hoped to take my person. Evidently, gold was his God.

Beside this letter were three I. O. U.'s, two for ten pounds each and one for twenty, all signed by the same man, one Sparks, and a note from a woman, the contents so broadly coarse that I tore it to bits after reading it.

There was nothing in all this to help me out of my present dilemma, and by the time I had read and digested the captain's correspondence the sun was about peeping over the horizon. Presently it appeared, a red-hot ball, and as it shot its blasting rays athwart the great plain, clear on the yet motionless air came the call of a bugle and the faint rattle of drums. It was reveille, and, unknown to me, I had lain close to the camp of the enemy.

I was too unfamiliar with military affairs to presume much on my uniform, and it is well I did not attempt it. I was promptly halted by the first sentinel I came upon and escorted by the officer of the guard to headquarters, which was almost opposite the tavern where I had had my first interview with Miss Romaine. It was quite a pretentious dwelling, or had been.

I was not surprised to see that the commanding officer was a young man—a lieutenant, I took him to be—about my own age. The force occupying the village was hardly great enough to warrant a man of high position being in charge. Simcoe, I knew was at Oyster Bay on the sound, the headquarters of the brigade, and Jamaica, securely inland, was only valuable as an incident on the great highway used by the British, and which extended from Hunt-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

ington Bay to the ferry in Brooklyn, or Brookland, as it was then called.

To me, as I walked along, the village seemed hardly less sleepy than on the day I drove into it with Brouer. There were but few more soldiers about, and a dozen or so tents were pitched in the wood-stacked fields. The barrack over the horse-shed was still occupied by men, but there was none of the hurry and life usually seen at a military post of importance. Jamaica was evidently an unimportant dot in a cantonment, and more valuable for quarters than aught else.

I was received by the young commander with all the importance due my supposed rank, and I told my story shortly, having conned it well beforehand. It was to the effect that I had been detailed from my regiment to capture a spy with whom I had a personal acquaintance; that I had failed in my mission, and that, leaving my men behind me, I had started for New York for further orders, but lost my horse through hard riding, and received the wound on my head in my tumble from the saddle. My probable ease of demeanor was no index to my mental state, for I fully recognized my present helplessness and the outcome of the discovery that I, an ex-militiaman of the colonial forces, was within the British lines and in the dress of a British officer.

The young fellow who listened to me evinced no suspicion as I finished my tale by asking for a mount.

"I am afraid I can not help you to a horse just yet, captain," he said. "Beyond the forage horses I know of none in the place. Clinton has made so many requisitions on us for horseflesh that we are

ALIAS CAPTAIN COLT

quite reduced, and the farmers have been skinned of their stock in a manner that, betwixt you and me, is shameful. Faith, sir," he exclaimed heartily, "I am by no means sad at your delay. My captain is on leave, and the sight of an equal is as refreshing as water in a desert. You will be my guest the while. I may be able to forward you if a train passes through to the city. You are from the world, and I have much to ask about. Two months of this will kill me! God, isn't it a hot hole? You will breakfast with me, of course. I fare at the tavern."

He spoke a few words to his orderly, then took me familiarly by the arm and we walked out, he questioning me on matters about which I knew nothing, I saving myself by a pointblank lie or professing ignorance where ignorance was excusable. Breakfast was served in a private room facing the street, and when we had finished my host appeared to be in no hurry to return to his duties. He crossed his legs, and, pulling out cigars, offered me one.

"If it is a fair question, captain, tell me—how did you come to lose your man?"

"Through treachery," I replied, glad to turn the conversation from military affairs.

"Ah," he interposed, with a boyish laugh. "You look as though you would like to meet the man who cozened you. How was it?"

"I wish he was hereabout at present," I returned, scenting an opportunity to fortify my position. "I shall probably be reprimanded when I should get sympathy. Read this; I am not revealing a military secret." And I handed out Chandler's letter to Colt.

He took the paper and read it with interest, curl-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

ing his small mustache the while with a hand like a lady's. He was almost effeminate in his delicacy of face and manner, and his physique did not impress me as belonging to a character associated with great strength of either mind or body.

"Well," he said, flicking the ash from his cigar, "I think I know the man, and I am not surprised at his duplicity. I do not love him. He irritates me with his perpetual smile. Chandler, isn't it?"

I nodded.

"Ah, yes. He caused the exposure of Hunter. I have not seen him since mine host was arrested. Did they hang Boniface?"

"I have lost track of him," I replied; "and Brouer, also. What became of the Dutchman?"

"Why—nothing was proved against him, but the proceedings were secret. Who is Annie Kronje?"

"I know no more than you," I returned. "Chandler has made a fool of us all. In my opinion Annie Kronje is a myth and this fellow but a picket for Chester, for when he heard I was ready to act he went to the very man I was after, made a pretense at capturing him, and let him get away. Who has the gold is a wide guess, but here I am, as you see, completely floored."

"How did you find out all this?" asked the officer, looking keenly at me.

"By tying up the nigger and lashing him. I have him safe enough. He knew it all."

"Faith! It is a bad business. You should lay the matter before Simcoe; he has the district. We must get Chandler. I will look into the matter."

I did not like his determination to look into the

ALIAS CAPTAIN COLT

matter, neither did I relish his small, penetrating eye as he held his gaze on me, not exactly in suspicion, but in a fashion that seemed mightily akin to it. Fortunately there came an interruption in the way of routine duty at that moment, and giving his excuses, he went out, bidding me to make myself at home in his house. But I was not hot for either his house or his company. I passed into the public room and remained, though my presence was a palpable restraint on the two or three gaming soldiers who were present.

Here I wandered aimlessly up and down, my nerves beginning to sing under the strain of the passing time. Though I had given directions that Colt should not be liberated until Wednesday night, I knew that his men, as well as his mother, would not remain in patient waiting until then. It was only too possible that a search would soon discover him; perhaps he was already free and the pursuit of me was begun. I might at any moment see a squad riding in hot haste up the street. I turned sternly from the thought, but the idea had so played upon me that I became almost unmanned. What a hell one may create in his own breast as the result of imagination! In vain I argued that Colt was well hidden, that the negro was faithful, and that in any event there was small reason for my pursuers to think I had fled west until they should stumble on to my dead horse, and even that might not be recognized as mine.

But my efforts at self-comfort were of little avail. Near noon I was fairly beside myself, and sent a soldier to the lieutenant to ask him if he yet saw

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

any chance to procure me a horse. His return was an invitation to call on him. I went. He received me courteously enough, but the matter of his conversation came like a thunderbolt. He informed me that he could not undertake the responsibility of forwarding me; that Colonel Simcoe would be able to act before I could report in New York; that his superior would wish every detail concerning the traitor—details which I alone could give—that he might be run down, and, moreover, a horse could not be spared. He ended by inviting me to dine.

I was too astonished and chagrined to protest. The terrible and unexpected situation into which I had now got myself was enough to whiten my hair. I was afraid of making any latent suspicion active if I did such an unmilitary and impolitic thing as to argue the question, for the onus of my delay now lay with him. In effect, though in polite words, I was detained against my will—in fact, I was a suspect—a prisoner—not under close confinement, not on parole. My actions were only limited by my daring; honor was not involved.

For this latter I was grateful, though gratitude then appeared unnecessary, but that day my dinner did not suffer from my appetite. We sat in the private parlor by an open window which looked on to the blazing and dusty street, and I dallied with my food, for each mouthful seemed to choke me. My young host, or captor, was all smiles and anecdote, regretting the circumstance of my presence at one mouthful, then thanking his stars for my company and drinking my health at the next. I began to think the boy was not the soft fool I had taken him

ALIAS CAPTAIN COLT

to be. He was sober and gay by turns, but he kept his head through all the wine we drank, for drink I did, although I could not eat. He marked my uncontrollable depression, and told me I looked like a lover who had got the mitten, and finally said that it might relieve my distress if a squad was sent to bring in the black prisoner. He might better have struck me in the face than have proposed it. I do not know what return I would have made to this tremendous proposition (for I plainly saw the coil gathering around me), but as I looked out of the window to avoid his pale blue eye, which always seemed to be searching me, I marked a man passing the house, a man mounted on a superb horse; indeed, I marked the horse first, and I almost uttered an exclamation, for there was Chandler in the flesh riding along slowly in the blinding and withering sunlight. He saw me plainly, and threw me an airy salute as he recognized me, evidently mistaking me for my cousin, and then he turned his animal into the shade of an immense maple that grew by the edge of the churchyard.

My eyes were glued on him, as though I was looking at a vision, and yet I was conscious that my *vis-à-vis* had not seen him, for with his head back he was puffing tobacco smoke into rings which he watched as they spun toward the ceiling. I observed my enemy slide from the saddle and tie the bridle to the low limb of the tree, and knew he was preparing to come to me. Was the world—my world—about to end? I was struck dumb and motionless for the moment, but was called to myself by a knock on the door, and the orderly entered with a letter which

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

he laid before the officer. He took and opened it, glanced at it hastily, and said: .

“Colonel Simcoe is not coming to-day, as I hoped. This is rather important, and demands an immediate answer. If you will excuse me, I will run over to quarters and return in ten minutes.”

I bowed, for I could not speak, but the young man, engrossed in his own business, failed to notice my emotion, and telling the soldier to follow him, he left, fortunately for me, turning from the public room to the main hall just as Chandler crossed the road and made for the coffee-room entrance. Thus they did not meet.

Unless I was to be translated I saw no hope for myself, but I suddenly become strangely calm, just as men do, I think, when death appears inevitable, and it was this calmness that enabled me to use my wits. Then it occurred to me to follow the officer, make a dash for the horse, mount it, and be off, risking a shot and all else, though at the same time I saw that chances were against ultimate escape. Had it not been for the consideration of my bounden duty to warn and save Marian Romaine, and had I been morally free to look to myself alone, the plan might have been feasible had I not delayed.

But precipitate flight became impossible, for hardly had the idea outlined itself when the latch clicked and without ceremony Chandler entered the room.

CHAPTER XXI

CLOSE QUARTERS

I HAD not left my seat, and sat looking at the man without moving. His face bore the old set smile I hated, a smile that grew partly from a characteristic desire either to conciliate or deceive, and partly to show the rather fine teeth of which he was undoubtedly proud. He made no offer to shake hands nor did he rush up in the effusive way I had expected, possibly being held off by the surliness of my expression. It is probable, too, that his friendship with my cousin was only bound by the slender thread of self-interest. I can conceive no such thing as affection between two such men.

"Well, Colt," he said, closing the door behind him, "did you get my letter?"

"Yes," I said, shifting my back to the window that he might get in his eyes the dazzle from the street.

"And you got back in time! What luck?"

"None at all," I answered gruffly, suddenly inspired to overcome the fellow by force the moment he discovered my identity.

"No?" he exclaimed, halting in his hesitating advance.

"No," I replied shortly.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

The smile disappeared from his face and his lower lip fell in ill-concealed chagrin.

“And—and the gold?”

“He got away with it, for aught I know,” I returned, rising impulsively and looking out of the window, both with the hope of attracting him away from the vicinity of the door and to see if the officer was returning. The time seemed horribly long, but not a soul was on the blistering highway.

“Do you mean to tell me that Chester got clean off and carried that gold with him?”

“Yes,” I returned, keeping track of my man from the corner of my eye. There was evidently something strange in my reception of him or his intuition came to his rescue, for instead of coming nearer me, he stepped toward the wall that he might get a good look at my profile, for now I stood in the full light. I felt that it was a waste of talent to attempt to deceive him—indeed, I knew he already suspected something—and it was a desire to bring matters to a head and save time that I turned and met his eye. He gazed at me steadily for a moment, then his teeth bared and his face took on a look of honest ugliness. Retreating to the door, against which he set his back, he raised his finger and pointed at me, then with an air of sarcasm, said:

“He got away, did he? Oh, he did? Well, let me assure you that Mr. Chester has *not* got away and that he will not *get* away!” Then changing his manner, he blurted out: “By the Lord Harry, I will get even with you now, for all your smartness! Like hell I have hated you for three years, waiting for my

CLOSE QUARTERS

chance—and it has come. I'll humble your cursed superiority, you pauper, you damned rebel, you sneaking dog, you spy! How came you here? What have you done with Colt?"

He shot this at me with an impetuosity in strong contrast to the affected drawl of his earlier manner, his eyes half closing, his words snapping as though his white teeth had bitten them off. Why the fool did not raise an alarm at once, unless he desired to first flay me with his tongue, is more than I can tell. Many a battle has been lost only because it was considered won.

"Let me pass. You are drunk or crazy," I said, stepping to the center of the room.

"Not until you go under guard or over me, my friend. You sent me on a fool's errand once, curse you, but I'll send you to where you'll not be back from. Don't attempt to befog me; don't pretend to me; I know you well enough. Where's Colt?"

The hedge had closed in. I glanced through the window to see if all was yet clear, and to my consternation marked the officer leaving his house, shielding his head from the sun by holding up his hat. He stopped a moment to speak to the messenger, who was about to mount his horse. I had but one chance, and that required rapid action. Without replying to the query about Colt, I whipped out my sword and dashed at the man by the door. I do not think he looked for an attack. To him I was completely invested and resistance was worse than useless. This might have been the reason he played with me, but he played too long. At all events, he was ready for contingencies, for as I took the first step

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

forward, like a flash his hand went into his pocket. I saw a flame and heard a stunning report, but without knowing whether I was hit or not I closed with him. He caught the blade of my descending sword on his left hand, and I marked the blood spurt from his palm as the steel cut into it, though he clung to it with a firm grip. I heard a shout from without, and the sound nerved me; for a moment my strength seemed absolute. Dropping the hilt, I seized the fellow by the neck. He uttered a curse as he struck at me with the pistol and tried to cry out, but, as he had done, I caught the weapon, wrenched it from his hand, twisting him about in the act, and with the butt smote him on the head. His weight fell against me like lead, and I eased him to the floor just as the door was dashed open by the officer, who entered on a run, followed by a number of soldiers from the public room.

It was a dramatic climax and the most exciting moment of the many I have had, but sharp as is my recollection of it I remember but little of that which immediately followed. I know I made the story of the attack consistent with my previous tale. Chandler, not dreaming of my presence, had entered. I had accused him of being a spy, and when I had attempted to arrest him, as I was going to the door to call the guard, he had fired at me, probably with the intention of getting rid of the only evidence against him. I had then turned and fought, as much to save my life as to gain my prisoner. It was a plain case, and was corroborated in part by the blood that was trickling down my face, for by strange chance the bullet, being misaimed through hurry, had plowed

CLOSE QUARTERS

my scalp exactly where I had been wounded by the hilt of Colt's sword.

This story and the wound I plainly recollect, and also that through my unstable wits I was cognizant of a great dread lest the man I had struck should regain his senses before I could get away. I do not recall his removal or how I left the house, and can only pick up the thread of events from the time I found myself again in the officer's quarters, where a surgeon was putting my head in order. The wound itself was superficial, the man told me, scarcely of account, though he had never seen so wide a laceration from a single bullet, but through the heat and excitement I was fairly well used up. I seemed to have awakened from a dream at that time, and then the past came out as plainly as the necessities of the future.

"Nevertheless," I said, turning to the officer, who was with us, "I must go on my way. You can see the importance of it; indeed, it has now become imperative. This scrimmage will serve a fair end for me, as one spy is as good as another. As for the means, there is the prisoner's horse. By the way, how is he?"

"You failed to hit hard enough," said the doctor; "but he's in for a headache that will last him until he's hanged. I only made a passing examination; he is yet unconscious, but I find no fracture."

"I hope I have your permission, sir, but must even go without it," I said to the lieutenant, as I set my hat on my head.

"You seem in a devil of a hurry, captain," he replied. "For myself I am sorry I only have jurisdiction over the horse, but a broken head is a poor

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

traveling companion and the sun is terrific. You had better wait."

"Impossible. It is my plain duty. I will be back in a couple of days; my evidence will be needed."

"Go, then, if you must. You will have the best beast I have seen in a month. As you can get into the city before sunset, you will have no difficulty for the lack of a pass."

"Good-by, then, gentlemen," I said. "I am sorry to be abrupt and make the shift a short one, but if I am to ride slowly, as I must, I had best be off."

I shook hands with the two with as much apparent ease as though I was not being ridden by the devil of fear which clung to me, spurring me into haste. Every moment was precious, as I knew the instant Chandler could speak he would blurt out the facts to the first ears that would listen. With an air as gay as ever Colt possessed, albeit my head was aching savagely, I waved the unsuspecting men adieu and walked to the horse, which was still hitched under the tree, and in barely half an hour from the time Chandler entered the tavern I rode off at an easy pace, thanking God for my deliverance thus far, and, strange as it may appear, thanking him, too, that I had not taken my enemy's life. What lay before me now I could not guess; but certainly, thought I, I will not go through a closer quickset of danger without coming out with worse than a lacerated scalp—a wound so slight that my hair would hide it; never again will I come to such close quarters with Death and elude his grasp. But man's prophecy amounts to but little more than breath.

CLOSE QUARTERS

I was not challenged by the sentry, who sat sleepily in the shade of an apple-tree. He looked at me, leaped to his feet to salute, then sank back to his recumbent position, and I passed, going on a jog until well from his sight.

The old road from Jamaica to Brookland ferry is as fair a highway as any in the land, far surpassing the rut-scored thoroughfares of Connecticut. Many a time, in the days before the war, I had passed over it, and the way was not new, though now it appeared so. For the lusty groves that had once cast their shade athwart it were gone almost to a tree, and the fresh stumps, extending over a space of acres, gave a melancholy cast to the whole landscape. West of Jamaica and as far as Bedford every hill was bare and the broad roadway deeply wounded by the wheels of supply and artillery trains.

On the day of which I write the dust lay thick, an impalpable powder that rose like smoke under my horse's feet, strangling both the beast and myself. To attempt speed would be worse than useless, for I saw that, powerful as was my mount, if urged he would soon succumb to the terrific heat of the afternoon sun, as the easy amble into which I shook him when free from the eye of the guard sent him into such a state of lather and distress that I was forced to let him take his own pace, which was no more than a walk.

And, indeed, the weather was something deserving more than mere comment. The most casual observer would have recognized the strain of the elements. There was something sinister in the whole aspect of nature, but its quality was hard to define,

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

though even the stress which I was under failed to blind me to the unvoiced threat of the weather. I was struck by the silent writhing of the earth and air, and felt that something far out of the common was soon to occur. The sky was not blue; it had not been truly so for days, but held a flat, white-hot appearance, giving an impression that the universe was veiled in an envelope of heated dust. The distant horizon blended into this canopy without contrast. The near landscape trembled under the waves of fervency that rose from it until it troubled the eye to scan the prospect. The air was dead; the leaves hung motionless, their forms and shadows without clear outline, and there was no voice of life save from the locust that seemed to revel in the furnace, sending out its strident blare from some thicket, as though to call attention to its endurance and the otherwise silent barrenness of the world. Not a bird did I see or hear; no cricket chirped, no bee hummed of its presence. The small watercourses were as dry as the road, and the standing grass had turned to hay.

Though I noticed these things, I was too preoccupied to think much of them or of my own discomfort, and it was not until my wound was stinging, my tongue coated with the powder from the road, and my head becoming dizzy that I realized the danger of sunstroke, and then I pulled up for a moment under the occasional single tree that offered shelter, and made from one to the other as though they were several oases. The fervency had become more than tropical. Finally I filled my hat with leaves and held a bough over my horse's head, and thus I got over the

CLOSE QUARTERS

ground, slowly, no doubt, but well-nigh as fast as any one would be able to follow.

I think it must have been somewhere about two o'clock when I left Jamaica, as I figured from the position of the sun, and it was some time after three when I sighted Howard's Half-Way House, near the cleft in the hills known as "Jamaica Pass." I had no desire for an immediate taste of another tavern, and though both myself and horse wanted water, I determined to take no chances.

It was at this spot that Howe had culminated his famous flank movement to the rear of the colonials two years before, and fearing that the pass was now well guarded, I followed the hint he himself had given on the eventful eve of the battle of Long Island, and turned my animal to the more northerly path, which led me through a lovely bit of rolling country,* and here finding a footway and a pond, I watered my horse and kept to the path until it brought me out on the road that leads to the hamlet of Bedford.

Thus far I had met no one going or coming, but now I came upon a train of empty wagons drawn by jaded horses and bound east. Receiving the salutes of the squad of cavalry in escort, I passed on to Bedford, went through the sleepy village with its yet untouched trees, and stopped at an outlying farmhouse for rest, as I felt that another mile would be followed by collapse.

For two mortal hours I sat in the hall by the open door, one eye on the road, the other on my horse,

* Now Evergreen Cemetery.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

hitched in the yard. I knew the risk I ran in this delay, and did some close figuring based on guesses alone. It gave me some comfort to assure myself that Chandler would hardly be in condition to tell his story for at least an hour or two after I struck him, even if the officer should consent to hear it. I could guess the precipitate haste that would follow if the wounded man was believed (which was more or less doubtful), and thought—and thought rightly—that the officer would take my expressed intention to go to New York as a subterfuge, and start his pursuit toward the coast.

But all was uncertain. Even Colt might be on my track by this, and I wrought myself into such a state of impatience that I knew my rest would be of little avail. Somehow I did not worry about my uncle. No mention had been made of his capture, and therefore I knew he must be safe, though his whereabouts I could not even guess at.

At five o'clock I mounted and went my way. I marked a blackness to the sky that was not caused by any gathering of clouds; rather did it appear that the heavens had thickened and were shutting down on the earth.

The sun was becoming a dirty yellow as it sank to the west, and I had not been long on the road ere I both heard and felt a distant crash of thunder, but it seemed to break from no particular point, and I marked no lightning. I thought, too, that the air had some movement—not a breeze, but as though the stagnant atmosphere was being pushed along by some great force yet far away. Farms, once thrifty but now fenceless and shabby, stretched away on either

CLOSE QUARTERS

hand. Fruit orchards were plentiful, but dwellings were few and far between. I met more people now; some soldiers, some yeomanry, but was always saluted respectfully and was never stopped. When I got to the Black Horse Tavern, in the village of Brookland itself, I found I was within a stone's throw of the intrenchments cast up by the American forces, the line crossing the road.* From the top of Cowenhoven's *bosch* † and onward toward Gowanus, the defense, marked by the freshly turned earth, was plain for much of its length, and here I was halted by the guard and asked to state my business within the lines, the demand also including my name and regiment. I gave the latter briefly, and for the former pulled out the invitation to the ball.

Had the document been a pass from Clinton it would not have received more respect. The officer handed it back with a bow and some remark about my being in luck, meanwhile cursing his own and the heat, then he insisted that I should go into the tavern and drink with him. But having in my eye the gathering of redcoats beneath the great tree by the door of the hostelry, and fearing recognition, I declined, and, without too much courtesy, pricked my horse into a gallop, and was at last fairly within the wide-spreading cordon known as the inner British lines.

Onward I went, now at speed, passing the old Dutch church with its quaint bell-tower that stood in the middle of the highway, the road dividing at

* The American works crossed Fulton Street at about its intersection by DeKalb Avenue. The Black Horse Tavern was a few hundred feet above.

† Now Washington Park.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

its front and meeting behind it, passing the Duffield house with the broad arrow, denoting confiscation, painted on its door-posts, passing the little family burying-ground (now obliterated) that lay hard by the highway, and on into the slight stretch of farm land that still lay between me and the ferry.

I was going now as fast as I dared, for a loitering pace might have invited interruption, nor did I slacken it at the sight of a group of gold-laced officers sitting under the broad eave-roofed piazza of the Duffield house, but flung a careless salute, which was returned, though I was conscious that two or three of the sitters rose to their feet and looked after me as though wondering why a man should ride like that through such a heat. As I turned on the brow of the hill a quarter of a mile below, a hill that slopes rapidly to the river, I had a clear look to the west, and the sight of the sky was appalling. A curtain of inky clouds, the upper edge as straight as though ruled, was lifting from the Jersey hills, the sun burnishing its upper limits with a copper-colored glow that pushed ahead like a fringe. To this phalanx of darkness there were no outriders, no banners of torn cloud, only a sheet of blackness, as though night was about to do battle with day. The distant city showed white against the somber background, and at its southern end I marked a thin but broad column of smoke that rose straight into the windless air. It was from the embers of the recent great fire, but I had then heard naught of it.* The water of the Sound River lay flat in the sun, its surface broken only by

* This was the second great fire that had devastated New York—August, 1778.

CLOSE QUARTERS

the swirl of the tide. A few ships of war lay at anchor in the stream, a transport quite near the shore was unloading men, and at my feet, rendered startlingly distinct by the peculiar light, was the ferry itself, the Corporation House or King's Head Tavern, and the few buildings that clustered about the landing.

There was something strangely exhilarating in the sight, and the prospect, together with my speed, set my nerves tingling. I have always been moved by the coming of a tempest, but never as I was then. The conflict was to be out of the common; a child could see that much, and the soul-inspiring marshaling of forces, the tremendous menace of nature, made my own case sink into insignificance for the moment.

Knowing I should be obliged to wait for the return of the boat, the black speck of which I could see making its way to the other side, I reined my dripping horse and went slowly down the hill, reaching the tavern just as the sun was blotted out by the advancing storm, the sudden darkness being marked by a roll of thunder that jarred the land like the diapason of an organ. To remain waiting outside in the face of the coming tempest would be but to stimulate the curiosity I wished to avoid, and considering it better to face any music that was in store for me, I rode into the stable, and leaving my horse in charge of the hostler betook myself to the house.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CORPORATION HOUSE

THE Corporation House, so called because it was the property of the city of New York, was a gloomy stone building two stories high and some fifty or sixty feet square. It stood within easy pistol-shot of the landing, and was a favorite resort for the young bucks of the city, probably, with the exception of Fraunce's in New York, the most frequented tavern for miles about. I did not know its popularity then, but discovered it soon enough. Before the war it had held the title of "The King's Head," bearing this equally with another, for it had also been known as the "Coffin House," from the circumstance of a coffin once having been hoisted to the top of the flag-pole as the result of a skylarking raid by a number of the *jeunesse dorée* from across the river.

The place was crowded when I entered, and that, too, by what would have passed as the "upper class." Officers from the transport, officers on leave, officers in transit, together with a sprinkling of civilians dressed in the height of fashion, albeit their costumes looked lax from excess of heat and want of starch. If the place had not changed in character, its interior had in appearance. The quiet decorations of my day had given place to a lavish display of crimson and

THE CORPORATION HOUSE

gold, and the political conservatism of a few years ago drowned in such an air of royalism that there could be no question as to the temper of the proprietor. The arms of the king, pictures of the king, mottoes anent the king, caricatures of Washington, and scurrilous rhymes about the colonists were in evidence everywhere. The patched and painted faces of the few women I saw were sufficient certificates of their calling, and yet this resort suffered in no way from a lack of patronage of the great of both sexes. I did not know until later what a hell had been made of the city. I knew it to be a center of gaiety, and I had heard rumors—and who has not?—of cruelty and vice, but a single day in the whirl opened my eyes to the fact that the brotherhood of man was a meaningless phrase; that the law of self was greater than the law of God. It was plain enough even here. I heard two civilians talking of how neatly they had cheated a third; gaming was in progress at nearly every table; and at the far end of the immense coffee-room something like a quarrel was under way. I stopped long enough to mark the assemblage, but the sudden quenching of the sunlight had brought many to their feet, they passing out, and I stepped aside that I might find the proprietor, for though the number present was an element of safety, I thought it advisable to obtain a room where I could at least be beyond earshot of the crowd. Lamps were being lighted by the time I made my arrangements, and they had become necessary, for the gloom was like that of early evening, and all interest now centered in the coming storm. The coffee-room was all but deserted, and I was about to go out when an officer

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

who had been eying me from the end of the desk stepped up.

"Is this not Captain Colt?" he asked with an easy grace.

"It is," I said, taken aback and wondering what was about to come, for his manner betrayed no excitement and his face showed naught but good-will.

"I thought as much," he answered laughingly. "The description tallies. My name is Camp. I am of Pigot's staff, and on forced leave by grace of the French."

He laughed again and held out his hand, and I understood that he was unable to join his superior at Newport on account of the blockade of that city by the French fleet. I laughed in turn as I took the proffered hand.

"And what of my description?" I asked, forcing the matter.

"Oh, Rothwell—Major Rothwell—was here according to the terms of your letter, but was unable to wait. He left but half an hour since, and describing you, asked me to deliver this."

He dove his hand into his pocket and pulled out a note.

That I was in the lion's den was forced strongly upon me at that moment, but I had passed through too severe a school to part with my presence of mind. While I thanked God for the writer's absence I made some trite remark, tore open the missive, and apologizing for the hurry, read as follows:

"DEAR JIM: Sorry I could not wait, but have a little matter on hand in which three would be a

THE CORPORATION HOUSE

crowd. It was unforeseen. This will introduce Captain Camp, who will undertake to stand in my stead. Treat him well. He plays a devil of a poor game of loo, and has money that burdens him. I brought down your bonnet and shawl from Kingsbridge as you requested. Loosely has them, and will deliver on demand. Hope to be able to see you at Robinson's later, but am not sure, as the matter on hand is of high flavor. Commend me to the fair Marian. Trust you will have better treatment than at last interview. Hope to have borrowed a couple of joes of you, but suspect you are as much on end as ever.

"Yours in haste,

TOMMY."

The letter, that of a boon companion, was clear enough save in the reference to a bonnet and shawl. It might mean a woman, and it might mean something else, but my first impulse was to hand it over to Captain Camp that he might be made aware of the character of the writer. I restrained the impulse, however, before I finished the note, and excusing myself, turned to the proprietor and asked him what had been left for me.

"Great bottles!" he exclaimed; "I beg ten thousand pardons! I will have it in your room in a jiffy. Your dress uniform, sir! Major Rothwell told me you would call. I had quite forgotten. You will forgive me, sir. Of course—of course——"

The mention of a uniform came like a revelation. I had never thought of its necessity, but now I saw how completely I should have been balked of my purpose without it. For an officer to insult his host by appearing at a ball in a costume only fit for the

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

road or field would have meant more than a breach of etiquette. Truly, I might have sent in a note to the young lady, but at the last moment I should have hesitated at the risk of such a procedure. I breathed freer as I turned to the captain, and was about to speak to him when the room was lit by a dazzling flash, and at the same instant an outburst of thunder nearly took me from my feet. Complete as was the shock of the report, it was immediately followed by an explosion that rocked the stanch building like a house of cards. The glassware about the bar leaped from the shelves and splintered on the floor, half the panes of the windows flew in fragments into the room, a yard or more of the ceiling came down with a crash, filling the apartment with dust, and oaths and the shrieks of women arose on all sides.

For myself I was thrown into a chair and clutched the table I found before me to prevent myself from falling, and I saw my new acquaintance grasp the woodwork of the bar and hold on, his face white and set. Fortunately for the safety of the building, the lighted lamps hung on chains, and though none fell, all swung violently, as though stayed from the deck of a ship in a storm.

It was several minutes before anything like calmness followed the outburst. I knew by its character that the second detonation could not have been thunder, and it was not long ere the news was brought that a powder-ship, recently arrived from London, had been struck by lightning at her anchorage off Wall Street and completely demolished.*

* A fact. Every one on board was annihilated and scarcely a vestige of the vessel was afterward found.

THE CORPORATION HOUSE

As I recovered from the demoralization of the shock I hurried to the door. The piazza was crowded with men whose faces were pale as death, and from all arose that wild and hysterical clamor which invariably follows high nervous tension. Through the shattered parlor window I marked two women on the floor in a dead faint, attended by their paramours, and I think all the rest were in tears. The sky was now of an even blackness, but as yet no rain had fallen, and the air, though a trifle fresher, was still motionless. But it was not to be for long. As I looked toward the city I saw coming both the wind and the rain, and with a line as clear as the front of a cavalry charge and a roar that makes description useless, I saw it tear across the flat river. In an instant the black tide turned white, but beyond this I marked little. It came like an impenetrable wall of water, and at once the parched land was deluged. The broken windows let in both wind and flood, and again confusion was rife.

I got myself away from the crowd and went upstairs. Fortunately my windows were intact, the panes being small, but the volley of the rain and the lightning and thunder, now incessant, were demoralizing. I was looking about for means of obtaining a light when Camp came in swearing that he could not abide being alone nor could he stand the rumpus and wet of the room below, and we two sat down to await the upshot of the storm, I willing enough to have his company, for there was no danger to be apprehended from him, and I might be able to make him of use in the way of getting information. But of information I received none, for he was not a char-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

acter that welled with knowledge of any kind, but from him I obtained that which in those days (and in these) proved quite as essential. I mean money.

For a long time neither spoke, the noise making conversation impossible. I did my cousin the honor of giving him a thought, wondering if he was still imprisoned in the coach, and how he fared through the tempest. For myself the storm would be a help. No human being could face it, and while it raged I was safe, nor was the time lost to me, for I could not present myself at Hanover Square until late. I knew little of high functions, but I knew that much. Colt was not invited to dinner, but to the ball that was to follow, and if I appeared and had a word with Miss Romaine before midnight I would be doing well. Beyond that I had not given my movements a thought. To warn the lady of her position had been the end in view, the rest was a matter for after-consideration. I had not the ghost of a plan for any future movement toward my own safety, and as I now thought of the matter I saw no opening for escape unless I took the desperate step of doubling on my tracks and going east to Southold, a thing I knew was all but impossible, as my horse would be abandoned; indeed, I had already abandoned it, for I would not dare to come again and claim it. I must do the rest of my journey afoot; a horse would be useless—a cause of delay and a means of identification.

And yet I was in no mood supinely to lay myself down after the warning and let the enemy work his will without a struggle. I had vague ideas of attempting the lines immediately above the city, and

THE CORPORATION HOUSE

again at Kingsbridge, or, in some way, getting to Jersey; then, failing in these, I thought of disguise, but the thread of my thoughts was broken by Camp, who, as the storm lulled its violence, proposed throwing dice to relieve "a damnable fit of the blue devils," as he expressed it.

"I hear you always win," he said; "but I'd rather lose than sit and gnaw my nails until this cursed storm is over. We are propped up here like a couple of gravestones, and you won't get across the river for two hours, at least."

Knowing the character of my cousin, I thought it wise not to refuse outright, but bemoaned the fate that had made me short of cash, though I told Camp that I had three I. O. U.'s from Sparks, and if he knew the man and had faith enough in the name to cash them I would give him a bout. To my astonishment he told me he knew that officer well; that he was a fool to play so heavily, and that he, Camp, had two or three of that gentleman's notes in his own pocket. However, knowing the standing of the officer, and that it was probable the next incoming vessel would bring his lordship's remittance, he would consent to cash the papers for the sake of getting me to join him at a toss of the dice. From this I gathered that Sparks was a type of the gambling daredevil aristocrat which came to the colonies in force as much from love of adventure as from any principle involved. The war brought many such, and stranded a portion of them, which circumstance has not tended to strengthen our blood.

I passed out a ten-pound billet, for which I promptly received the cash, and almost as promptly

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

lost. The second ten-pound note went the way of the first, but I felt no compunctions at thus making merry with Colt's money, though I thought it probable that his reputation as a successful gambler was being undermined. By the time the first twenty pounds had been lost the storm had well-nigh ceased, and it was hard upon ten o'clock. I went down to Loosely and told him to notify me the moment the boat arrived, for with the ending of the tempest my nervousness began to grow. I then dressed myself in finery every detail of which had been provided by the foresight of Rothwell, and having arranged my hair to conceal the wound, sat down again to the dice, for Camp had clung to me like a leech; to-morrow he would be boasting of his luck over Colt of De Lancey's. I could see the fever of the gamester in his eye, and he was only too glad to pass over the gold in exchange for the last note for twenty pounds.

From then the game went slowly, the fortunes equally balanced. The stakes were ten-shilling bets, and he had won but two pounds when there came a rap at the door and a general call through the hall that the ferryboat had returned and would start back at once.

I swept the balance of the coin into my pocket and jumped up, richer by eighteen pounds in cash than when I sat down, and bidding my companion good night, took the portmanteau containing the clothes I had discarded, and went off abruptly.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BALL

A FEW stars were shining and the moon seemed sailing at a great rate through a deep blue sea into the ragged aftermath of vapor that flew from the west like foam-crested waves. The air was delicious. The road was deeply guttered, and the few links carried ahead for the ladies were reflected in the great puddles that wrinkled under the brisk breeze.

It was a tedious trip to the Fly Market stairs at the foot of Maiden Lane, the wind being contrary, and it was after eleven before I set foot on the New York side. As a British officer I went on without question, but every civilian was obliged to show a pass. I made my way to the King's Arms, near the Broadway, about the only tavern I knew, save Fraunce's, and cocking my hat, entered the house and demanded a room. Fortunately it was quiet at that hour, as this hostelry was not favored by the younger element, and getting my muddy boots in order I sallied forth.

Hanover Square was alive with horses, chairs, linkboys, and the scruff that always assembles to see guests enter the houses of the great, but I elbowed my way through the press with the same total disregard of the rights of others that was usually

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

affected by those of rank or position. When I passed the door and heard the name of "Captain Colt" shouted along the line of footmen, I think I was for the first time brought face to face with the enormity of my undertaking, and had not the game I was playing depended so largely on time, I would have beaten a retreat and waited.

For I was fairly dazzled. I had never been in touch with the frothy element known as "high society," though by description I had imagined the glories of a "state ball." The reality was beyond my expectation. The crowd, the color, the light, the glorious costumes, the glances of fair women, the glitter of the men, the hum of voices, the clinking of glasses and clatter of coin. A subtile, delicious perfume hung in the air. A young girl, bare on back and bosom, smiled and nodded at me as she swung by on the arm of her cavalier, whose notice was a scowl. From the ballroom proper came the measured music of the minuet, and thither I worked my way, not for the purpose of finding the Governor and presenting myself as a late guest, but to get from his ken, for he stood in the center of his office, now a reception-room, clad in white satin from head to foot, a stoop-shouldered, decrepit old man, his yellow skin made tawny by his magnificent costume. He was talking earnestly with a short, stout gentleman, whose single epaulette as well as the group that held aloof, told me he was of exalted rank. It was Sir Henry Clinton, as I soon learned. On Sir Henry's arm leaned a little lady gorgeously dressed, her baby face turned up to the Governor as though she hung on his words. The infantile prettiness of the woman doubtless ap-

THE BALL

pealed to the superannuated rake, for he wrinkled his parchment face into a smile and laid his hand over his heart as he made a profound bow to her remark. Two young officers passed me arm in arm.

"The Badely is in her element to-night," said one.

"Faith, she sticks to Sir Henry like a bur," was the reply, "and there'll be little fighting until this flame cools. What a thing it is to have a pretty wife! It has made the fortune of her husband. Let's go back for another cup; I'm not a third drunk, and 'tis nigh midnight."

I pressed on, absorbed in the gorgeous scene, yet thinking of the result of a possible recognition. If I could but find Miss Romaine and get word to her; if I could have her alone for one moment and warn her of her impending danger, I might then look to my own safety, which at present was mightily jeopardized by my surroundings. Could any one do more than I had done for patriotism—or love? The last word flashed on me. It came like a revelation. A man is honest with himself when he is in danger, if at no other time, and now I admitted that my temerity was not based entirely on principle. I wished to save the girl, and wished, too, that she might know the risk I had taken for her, know all I had accomplished for her, and I hardly more than knew her.

The door of the ballroom was jammed with loiterers, gay young bucks flushed with wine, looking at the dancers and exchanging coarse remarks. In the tangled maze of the performers I did not at first see the face I sought, but still stood there entranced by the beauty of the scene until I caught the salute of an officer, who smiled and waved his hand at me; then I

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

thought it advisable to get myself lost in another room.

At that moment I saw Marian. She was dancing with a tall dragoon officer whose spurs threatened to damage anything that came near, whose face, with its perked-up mustache, seemed to hold the world in contempt. The girl was a fine match for him in expression, for her small mouth had an impatient look, and though her courtesy was profound and she placed her hand in her partner's with easy grace, she never raised her eyes to his, neither did she go nearer to him than an arm's length.

She was supremely beautiful, painfully so to me, the patrician from the tip of her small blue satin shoe to the towering height of her powdered hair wound with a string of pearls. Her blue satin stomacher, low cut, was sown with pearls, and the glistening train she managed with exquisite grace was heavy enough to tire the arm and foot that manipulated its folds. Not a word did she vouchsafe to her partner, though he often bent low to speak to her or to cast his soul into his eyes as he flashed out his sword in the "arch" or sank to his knee in mock worship. A small black patch lay on her chin and her cheeks glowed, but whether from excitement or rouge I knew not; only she was brilliant—all others paled beside her.

If a sergeant had then laid his hand on my shoulder and announced that I was his prisoner I think that I would have asked him to wait until that dance was over. No scene had ever so captured me. Senses and sentiment were alike alive. The stately grace of the movement of the minuet (to which dance there

THE BALL

is no equal), the cadence of the measured harmony that crashed from the high balcony, the maze of color, the marble of bared bosoms, the flashing of soft eyes, the cold glitter of drawn swords, and the perfume from the open conservatory hanging heavy on the hot air, held me in a trance. Through it all, and though I saw it all, not for a moment did I lose sight of the girl or fail to mark her every movement. I was eating hashish, then, the hashish of sensuous delight; but I did not fall; I awoke later to something over which the seductions of the devil could not prevail.

The dance ended and the dancers crowded through the broad portal on their way to the open air. I stood aside, and as Miss Romaine passed on the arm of her escort, her head turned away from him, I caught her glance. All the blood in my body seemed to fly to my face as I bowed and moved my lips, but up went her round chin and her eyes gave me a look of such plain and unalloyed contempt that, forgetting the circumstances of my dress and assumed character, I was taken aback. But instantly I realized the mistake, and feeling the necessity of forcing matters, now as much for her sake as my own, I pushed my way to her side.

"Will Miss Romaine favor me with the honor of her hand for one measure?" I ventured, ignoring the curl on her lip. She drew her skirt from me.

"Is this Captain Colt's estimation of his own word of honor?" she asked, turning her back on me.

"But, madam," I persisted, stepping along behind her and speaking low, "at the risk of your great displeasure, I implore you to grant me time to speak a

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

word—a word from my cousin—from Mr. John Chester. He sends a message.”

I saw the color fade from her cheek and marked the lifting of her eyebrows, but the press behind us kept us moving, and she returned no answer as I doggedly followed her. Her escort seemed oblivious of my presence. Without relaxing my intention I pressed after the couple, sometimes coming close, sometimes being forced aside, until suddenly she drew her escort through a door, and, still following, in a moment I was in a garden that ran from the mansion well-nigh to the river. No sooner were we fairly out of ear-shot of the throng that moved about the piazza than the lady stopped, dropped her escort’s arm, and wheeled about. The light from the wing window was full in my face, but I could see enough of hers to discover that the disdain had gone from it and that her eyes held an intensity new to me.

“Sir,” she said in a low, vibrant voice, “on what honor you possess you have promised never to speak to me again. Your message may absolve you for your lack of faith; what do you wish to say to me?”

“Madam, what I wish to say is for your ear alone,” I answered.

“That is but a subterfuge,” she returned, her color growing. “Your presenee here is an offense to me; rise to your pretension of a gentleman and leave.”

“My duty to my cousin forbids it, Miss Romaine. Indeed, I must——”

“I don’t wish to interfere with Captain Colt’s duty,” interrupted the officer, “but Miss Romaine is under my protection. It won’t do, Colt—it won’t do!”

THE BALL

"I am speaking only to the lady, sir," I retorted.

"You will have occasion to speak with me shortly," was the quick return. "I forbid your further annoyance."

"And I forbid your impertinent interference," I answered hotly.

"By G—d! sir——"

"My lord, my lord!" interposed the lady, stepping between us; "I will have no quarrel here nor about me. As for you, sir," she said, as she swung around to me, but got no farther at once, for she stopped, and I saw a sudden change come over her countenance. "Perhaps—perhaps there has been a misunderstanding. Perhaps I have been unreasonable and hasty. I will hear you, Captain Colt—for five minutes. Will Lord Sparks give me leave? My lord, you may return in that time. I crave your lordship's pardon." She courtesied low, but the thin face of the man whose identity had been thus revealed to me—whose money I held in my pocket, took on an unmistakable look of anger as he bit his lip at my triumph.

"I hope Captain Colt will give me the honor of a few moments' interview this evening," he said loftily.

"With all the pleasure in life," I answered, with a smile.

He flung a salute and I saw him enter the house, nervously twisting his mustache, and then I turned to the lady.

"Mr. Chester, how dare you?"

"You asked me that question once before," I said, feeling an elation for which I could not account,

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"and I answered you logically. I am playing a game of chess, Miss Romaine. I have won a pawn—only a pawn, and am one move ahead. My aim is to capture the queen."

"You are mad!" she broke out impulsively. "How dare you? how dare you? You will ruin yourself and me. How came you to this place?"

"I shall not ruin you, though I may ruin myself for you. I have come——"

"Yes, you have come; but how will you go? We can not talk here, nor now. He will be back and—and you have involved yourself in additional trouble. Something has happened! What is it? I never dreamed it was you until you quarreled. You should be in Connecticut."

"Then let us thank God for the quarrel. As for my being in Connecticut, so should you be—or elsewhere than here, madam. Your fall will be greater than mine. It is true I have brought ruin near you; therefore it becomes my right and duty to serve you." And here I hurriedly told her of her precarious position; of the capture of Colt, the fight with Chandler, the disappearance of the squire, the raid on the Brouer house, and the unknown disposition of the Dutchman and the tavern-keeper; nor did I fail frankly to avow that I had put my own safety at a hazard to assure hers.

Her face was like chalk as I finished, her great blue eyes greater from the surprise and trouble in them. As I ceased speaking she laid her hand on my arm and a little smile showed that neither her strength nor spirit were yet overcome.

"It is strange that I have heard nothing," she

THE BALL

said. "That which looks like ruin is not always ruin; we are not yet undone. Your cousin's vindictiveness is likely to be our salvation. As for the squire, he is doubtless safe or you would have heard. Do not worry. See! I am almost glad, except for Brouer and Hunter."

She drew herself up bravely, but her white face betrayed her emotion.

"I must be a sight," she continued, as she noticed my look. "Stay here until I return. Lord Sparks will be back. Tell him to await me—I must not appear rude. I will not be gone long."

She went away, leaving me standing on the gravelled path, and entered the low wing window. She had hardly disappeared among the crowd within when I saw Lord Sparks returning. He walked straight to where I was standing, his haughtiness re-enforced and his temper not improved when he found himself confronting me instead of the lady.

"Miss Romaine bade me tell you she would return in a moment, my lord," I said pleasantly, for I bore the man no hard feeling.

"Her choice of a messenger is questionable," he returned priggishly. "Your company is objectionable, Captain Colt. You need no great penetration to understand me and our relations in the future."

"Precisely, my lord," I answered, knowing that I risked nothing; "and the loss is yours. I will not quarrel with you, however. Your position was justified, and you took your defeat with fair grace."

He swung about in full heat.

"Defeat, sir! *You* defeat *me*! You are a cad—a provincial cad, Mr. Colt. Moreover, you are a

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

blackleg—a card-sharper. I will make this good, sir.”

“You are a liar, my lord!” I said, quietly desperate. And I folded my arms, but otherwise did not move.

His long bony hands went to his sword-hilt as if he were about to draw, and even in the shadow of the tree under which we stood I marked the sudden pallor of rage that overspread his face. But the *noblesse oblige* of the aristocrat, which makes him conservative in action, though it leaves his speech unbridled, was strong upon this sprig of nobility. Restraining his desire to strike, he said fiercely:

“Have you a friend to whom I may refer mine, you puppy?”

“I have not taken an inventory of my friends, my lord,” I returned with a loftiness that at least equaled his. “You may send your friend to me. But get you gone yourself; you are childish and uncouth.”

His wrath was too great for words. In impotent rage he gnawed his slight mustache and cursed me with his eyes. Then he left me. I thought that my cousin would have a pleasant reception when he met his lordship again, and I fancied I had taken off my relative’s character fairly well, judging from the data obtained. I fancied, too, that Lord Sparks in his anger and chagrin had spoken the truth. James Colt was doubtless a card-sharper, and his lordship must have had a taste of his ability very recently. It would not be difficult to imagine the scene that would ensue when it became apparent that Captain James

THE BALL

Colt of De Lancey's dragoons had failed to keep his appointment on the field of honor.

For of course I could not fight. It was as unnecessary as it was impossible, though it behooved me to keep up appearances until the last minute. I can not say that I regretted the easily avoided quarrel. I was now plunged so deeply in a sea of difficulty that an item more or less was of small consequence, and I felt an indescribable satisfaction at the success of my venture. I had entered the house with my heart beating the devil's tattoo, but at the moment I was goading the royalist I doubt if there was a quieter pulse in the assembled company. I had at last obtained a thorough grip on myself, and from that moment I was never overcome by fear, though I can not say I felt none. God knows I had occasion!

Lord Sparks had not been gone more than five minutes, and I was becoming impatient for the return of the lady, when I was approached by an officer who came so directly to me that I knew his mission ere he spoke a word. He stopped and saluted.

"Captain Colt, or am I mistaken in the person? I am from Lieutenant Lord Sparks. My name is Robey."

He was a perfect foil to his principal, being as short and fat as his lordship was tall and thin, and his mustache, too stiff to curl, bristled like a *chevaux-de-frise*.

"Your friend is no laggard, Mr. Roberts," I said, "but you did not mention your rank."

"Robey, sir. Captain Robey, of the Queen's Own, sir."

"Very well, captain; but just now is not the

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

time nor just here the place to discuss your errand, of the nature of which I am perfectly aware. I am waiting for a lady. If you will call on me in the morning at the King's Arms we can settle the matter in form."

"At what time, sir?" he asked, as if the delay irritated him.

"I shall rise late. Make it nine o'clock," I returned. "Yonder comes the lady in question. I must ask your kind indulgence, sir."

"It is an unusual delay, Captain Colt; you might refer me to a friend."

"It is my whim, Captain Roley."

"Captain *Robey*, sir!" he blurted out.

"I beg your pardon, Robey. I will bid you good night. The King's Arms—and at nine." And I stepped past him to meet Miss Romaine, who was advancing. I saw the man hang on his heel a moment, then dash his hand across his forehead and amble back to the ballroom.

"Is he from Lord Sparks?" asked the girl, looking after him.

"Yes. I am to see him again to-morrow."

"To fight?" she exclaimed anxiously.

"Nay. How can I fight? It would ruin all. I hope to be far beyond his ken when he calls, but for the present I must keep up appearances."

"And I, too, have made one more enemy in the person of his lordship. I would that nothing troubled me more. But you must be beyond the ken of every one for a time. You can not stand here. I have a plan. I have much to think of—much to watch. Come with me."

THE BALL

The pink in her cheeks had returned, but there was no disguising the fact that rouge now took the place of the rich blood that had fled. I saw this as she laid her hand on my arm and we moved into the light, and when I told her that her late escort had come and gone again she appeared doubly anxious. We wended our way through the gay crowd back to the conservatory. The air was close, and therefore the place was deserted, and here she bade me stay until she came for me, and pretend illness or intoxication or anything that might be an excuse to remain there out of danger of being marked by a possible friend of Colt's.

If I had any immediate anxiety at this time it was that Rothwell might arrive, and under his eye or that of any intimate friend of my cousin's my disguise would become worthless in a moment. Therefore I was ready enough to remain hidden, and for an hour or more sat in the suffocating atmosphere of heavy odors, my chin on my breast, as if sleepily tipsy, while through the tangle of shrubbery I saw the dancers moving in the adjoining room. The music rose and fell. Anon a couple sidled into the hot, moist air of my retreat, looked askance at my sprawling figure, and went on with a laugh at my supposed condition or a remark about the closeness of the place. By two o'clock I was reeking at every pore, and was conscious that the crowd without was thinning. In fact, I was stupid, being half overcome by the atmosphere and the tropical odors I had been inhaling when Miss Romaine appeared and took my arm as if she had left me but the moment before. Her face already

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

showed the nervous tension to which she was yet subjected.

The rooms were half empty now, though there was a comfortable number yet remaining. All about were evidences of recent confusion and the shameless intoxication that was so common at the time of which I write. In a corner I marked two young officers clasped in each other's arms, both so dead drunk that neither could move. Bits of torn lace lay here and there, and the polished floor was splashed with wax from burned-out candles. And yet the dancers danced on. We went through the rooms, the lady on my arm saying little, for it was yet impossible to talk without danger of being overheard. Not for a moment did I doubt the girl's ability to save herself, and when I asked what she had determined upon she drew me into an alcove and said:

"I have an idea, and not a very desperate one, at that."

"What will you not sacrifice? To what has my lack of wit brought you?" I returned, realizing that any plan she had involved the giving up of all the luxuries to which she had been accustomed.

"My loss will be this," she whispered, waving her hand to indicate her surroundings. "I shall lose a deal of flattery I detest, and not a few thinly veiled insults. I shall lose the drivel of an octogenarian. I shall likely lose my fortune for a time, but as the best of it is in a landed estate it will not be carried far nor sequestered for long. You do not doubt the end?"

"Of the war?"

"Yes. Even with Washington beaten America is not subdued. Washington might have been beaten

THE BALL

easily, only the British army is here to rob, not to conquer, but the spirit of the people will never be conquered. Yes, I shall lose little and will gain much if we can get away from here. I am willing to lose it. I am so tired—so tired of acting.”

“Madam,” I said, “you will pardon me, but you said ‘we.’ Do I understand that I am included in your plans?”

She stopped and faced me, laughing lightly, perhaps to deceive others.

“Do you credit me with so little gratitude as to believe that I would climb over you to escape and leave you to suffer? Nay, sir; you wrong me. Moreover, it so happens that I can not help myself without helping you as well. I trust you have no objection to being assisted by a maiden.”

“Then I may still serve you?”

“Faith! ’Tis a gallant way of inquiring if I will still be a drag. Yes. I humbly confess I must. I will use you as a brother—if my plans go not wrong. Now I am ready to beard the lion in his den. My guardian has gone to bed fairly tipsy and foolish. Now is my time—when his eye is off me and his ears closed. Come and talk nonsense, like the rest. We will not dance, but walk. I must see Sir Henry.”

She drew me along until at last we entered the office in which I had seen the Governor and Sir Henry Clinton. Far from being deserted, it was evidently being used for a temporary office of headquarters, for an officer stood by the door barring out a gaping crowd. As he recognized Miss Romaine as one of the household, he lifted his sword and let us pass in. Sir Henry sat writing at an elaborately decorated

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

desk. A distinguished-looking old gentleman was beside him, peering over his shoulder, and an officer, evidently just arrived, was standing, hat in hand, beside them. I quaked as I marked that his boots were muddy, as if from the road. On a sofa of enamel and embroidery sat Mrs. Badely, her eyes like diamonds, her round cheeks pink with excitement, and by her side, staring at her with the underbred openness affected by the great, sat a young man of short stature with a grossly sensual face. He wore a brilliant uniform, and on his left breast blazed a great golden star. Three or four officers of high rank stood about, hanging on the words that passed, and after the manner of sycophants, laughing in unison at some sally from the seated couple. Miss Romaine bent toward me and whispered:

“His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. He is staying with Admiral Digby, who has charge of him. I thought he was not coming. There sits the admiral with Sir Henry.”

I had heard that Prince George was in America, but had never hoped to see him, nor was I now greatly edified by his appearance. Much more striking, much more to be respected, was the gallant sailor, whose face was as honest as it was sternly rugged. As I looked from the prince to his protector the waiting officer received a paper from the hand of Sir Henry and went out, while the lady on my arm turned toward the British general, who appeared to be at leisure for a moment.

“Now or never,” she whispered; “I dare not wait longer.” And we walked up to the desk.

“’Pon my word, my dear Miss Marian!” ex-

THE BALL

claimed General Clinton, jumping to his feet and saluting the hand held out to him. "I thought I must have offended your ladyship that I have had no glance from your bright eyes till now. I hoped to have been honored with your hand this evening."

As he spoke he acknowledged my presence with a quick glance and a slight bow, and I was satisfied that my cousin was personally unknown to him. I saluted respectfully in return.

"Your Excellency has been so surrounded that this has been my first opportunity to see you and pay my respects," said the girl. "Besides, your Excellency, I have been tardy for another reason. I lacked boldness—the boldness to ask you a favor, notwithstanding that you have sworn that your heart lay at my feet; sworn so often, Sir Henry."

She laughed gaily, and though the nobleman laughed in return, I noticed his eye travel to his mistress, who, however, sat well out of earshot, engrossed in the witticisms and flattered by the attentions of Prince George.

"My dear young lady," he replied, "a favor to you is one from you. But what can I possibly grant that you can not secure from your guardian, the Governor?"

"O Lord, Sir Henry! The Governor thinks me but a child; one who outrages good taste by having a thought above sweetmeats and a lover. He would refer me to you, anyway, and this is a matter of importance—not to me, but to a pensioner of mine—a girl, and her brother. The Governor has gone to bed, your Excellency."

"On my faith, your protégée is fortunate! Is it

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

the young lady or her brother who excites your interest—ha? Have I not got you there? By the Lord, admiral, why are we not young and in trouble?”

His full face reddened as he laughed at this flat joke, and his rheumy eye ran over the fair figure of the girl at my side, who, far from being taken aback, returned brightly:

“Your Excellency will gain nothing by this flank movement. My forces are too strong. I have not lost my heart to an unknown man. *You* should know that. But, Sir Henry, my girl friend wishes to return to Savannah. She hears her father is wounded and is sick. It is safe. We hold the city. I have promised her I would get her a pass. Now keep your promise to me, Sir Henry.”

The British general immediately sobered.

“A pass to Savannah? And how?”

“By one of your vessels, general.”

Clinton, who had reseated himself, wheeled his chair around to Admiral Digby.

“How now, Digby? Do you know of such a vessel?”

“Not to Georgia, general,” returned the naval officer. “I think there is a schooner for Charleston—yes, the *Sprite* runs down the coast with despatches for Cornwallis. We are awaiting the decision of Lord Howe.”

“Ah, yes,” answered Clinton, as if something had been brought to mind, then turning to the girl, he said:

“For your sake I would do all in my power for Miss—er—what is the name?—and her brother, but

THE BALL

the movements of the navy are not in my line, my dear young lady. Perhaps you can prevail on the admiral here. Hey, Digby?"

I saw the drift now, and was on fire at the half refusal of Clinton to grant a pass. It was his character to play with a situation, and this propensity cost him dearly in the end. Whether the matter was large or small, he lacked decision, and this lack was the cause of his final ruin.

Not thus with Admiral Digby. He simply said:

"If your Excellency recommends it I will consider it an honor to do Miss Romaine the favor of giving a pass on the Sprite. It is a trifle irregular, but I may need a friend at court some day."

A half twinkle came into his gray eye and he smiled grimly. "And yet," he continued, "it is a long step from Charleston to Savannah."

"It is a longer step from New York to Charleston, admiral," said Miss Romaine sweetly, "and perhaps communication between that city and Savannah is not too difficult. A pass to Charleston will be all I can offer; my friend will not look for the impossible."

"Oh, Lord! let the child have her way, Digby," said Clinton. "Else she will sulk for a month and have never a smile for one of us."

He arose from his chair laughing and handed a pen to the admiral, who moved to the desk. "Were there not so many present," he continued, with mock gallantry, "I would claim a reward for my influence."

"You may name your reward, sir," returned the

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

lady, looking down with an artfulness fit to stagger a saint. "Your wishes are my commands."

"God bless my heart and soul!" returned the general, his eyes glistening. "Why am I to sail to-morrow?"

"For Newport?" asked the girl, as if surprised, holding out her hand to him, but turning to the naval officer, who was writing. "The name is Jackson, admiral. They are Quakers, you know—brother and sister; and there is a maid—a colored maid; be sure and put in the maid.—Oh, yes, Sir Henry, and you will annihilate the French, I hope. And when shall you be back? We—I will look for your return."

"Your words lend one wings," he answered sentimentally, and was about to raise the girl's hands to his lips, when above a peal of laughter the voice of Mrs. Badely came clearly from the other end of the room.

"O Sir Henry—Sir Henry, you must come here immediately. I shall die of mirth—indeed, I shall. His Royal Highness is about to tell us the story of his French poodle that he has taught to bark at the French flag. Let your business go."

General Clinton started as if caught pilfering, and dropped the girl's fingers, then excusing himself, though not without a trace of confusion, he tip-toed to his mistress, who, regardless of court etiquette, had almost turned her back on royalty in order to call her paramour from temptation.

CHAPTER XXIV

FROM PILLAR TO POST

THROUGHOUT this interview I had been a non-entity, both policy and a lack of high rank forbidding me from uttering a word. I was only too thankful for my enforced silence, and though I stood merely as an escort my wits were not as quiet as my tongue. I saw the trend of the plan of escape plainly enough, and though it was with a feeling of relief that I marked the admiral's hand trace the last words of the pass that would open an avenue to liberty, I was not overcome by the prospect, and wondered why the girl had booked herself for such a distant haven, which, being in the enemy's hands, would be a haven only until the next vessel should arrive with a proclamation denouncing us both. It is true that I felt a decided warmth about the heart at the thought of being the lady's companion for perhaps an indefinite time, but the idea of leaving my uncle in a position which then might be one of extreme peril and myself go to what seemed to be the end of the earth without a knowledge of his condition or leave him with a knowledge of mine in order to insure my own safety, appeared to be a cowardly desertion on my part. And yet, what could I do? To attempt to find him would be to increase my own hazard, and, as a

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

marked man, my presence with him would go far to damn him. I felt he would advise me to go.

No sooner had the admiral delivered the pass into the hands of Miss Romaine with a remark to the effect that the brother in question had better put himself in communication with the commander of the *Sprite* in order to secure accommodations and ascertain the hour of sailing than the prince rose to go, and shortly after the room was deserted. Then the young lady laid down the method of future procedure with a confidence that made for certain success. She informed me that she had known as well as the admiral that there was no vessel about to sail for Savannah; that the *Sprite* was but awaiting word from Lord Howe in order to start for Charleston; and that she had selected that point because she had relatives in the Carolinas, and the pass would enable us to leave that city. It was a shrewd bit of foresight, and with the air of one who was in the habit of being obeyed she tendered the paper to me, telling me to obtain an appropriate costume with which to disguise myself, and proceed to act according to the admiral's instructions. I was not to communicate with her again, but by putting myself on shipboard at the proper time I should find her and her maid, and, she added archly: "You need not be offended at receiving a sisterly snub; and do not forget your 'thees' and 'thous.'"

The girl was bubbling over with enthusiasm, while my own was cooling. One would have thought she was but planning an *al fresco* entertainment instead of making preparations to fly from a home where liberty, and perhaps life, was in danger. The

FROM PILLAR TO POST

whole thing was to be beautifully simple. I was to be Mr. Jackson. I was to go aboard of a vessel and sail away with a young lady who, I am but fair to myself to state, I was more than half in love with, and was likely to be wholly so if things fell out as planned. As if she read my thoughts about the squire, she concluded her instructions with the statement of the undeniable fact that my uncle had done nothing to which the authorities could take exception.. That he might be safer if arrested and in their hands than at large and at the mercy of Colt. It was from Colt he had fled. As for Brouer and Hunter, they had taken their chances, as she had—as had I. Our sphere of usefulness was over for the present; our right, our duty, was to save ourselves.

I was far from being unmoved by the way she coupled me with all her plans, knowing it to be as easy for her to travel alone with her gigantic negress as with me posing as a brother. My presence would be an additional risk to her, but I knew little of her selflessness then, being somewhat blinded by my surroundings, her quick management of difficulties, and the *bon camarade* air with which she treated me. When I left her that night, bowing over the little hand with all the formality of a mere acquaintance, she smiling at the trite compliment I uttered (for others were about us), I felt that I had known her always.

It was glimmering daylight in the east by the time I got to my room, and, after laying out my plans for the next few hours, I changed the full uniform I wore for that of the day before and threw myself, dressed,

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

on the bed. I must have slept heavily, for the sun was streaming hot through the open window when I was called and told that a Captain Robey was below and wished to see me. At that moment the clock on the Dutch church struck eight, and it was evident that my caller had advanced the hour I had given him. His lordship was probably becoming impatient. Believing there would be less danger for me above stairs than below, I ordered the gentleman to be sent up to me, and a moment later he knocked at the door.

A night of dissipation had not improved his temper or appearance, both his voice and eyes showing that he was not yet fully recovered from the effects of the wine he had evidently indulged in. With a bare recognition, he advanced only far enough to close the door behind him, and without heeding my invitation to be seated, threw out his round paunch and said huskily:

“I am here, Captain Colt, according to agreement. What have you to say to me?”

“I have to say you are here before your agreement,” I answered, nettled at the man’s attitude, though he looked so like a pouter pigeon swelling himself that I could have laughed in his face. “We will let that pass, and you will excuse me if I continue my toilet.”

“I will excuse anything if you will but come to the point,” he answered pompously.

“Well, Captain Tobey——”

“*Robey*, sir; *Robey*,” he exclaimed, snapping out the words.

“I beg pardon,” I answered mildly; “but the

FROM PILLAR TO POST

point is this. If his lordship is willing to apologize for the insult offered me I am willing to overlook the matter; more readily because I am on special duty and have scant time to chastise him as he deserves. If, however, he insists on a meeting, I, being the challenged party, will grant him the privilege the day after to-morrow morning at sunrise, and permit him to choose the weapons. I do not care for a second. I know it to be irregular, but I am willing to depend on his honor and yours—and on yours, sir. Is this satisfactory?”

His protest was forcible.

“No, sir; no sir; it is *not*. You should know better, sir, than make such a proposition. It is more than irregular, and the delay is preposterous.”

“Ah!” said I, speaking over the towel I was using; “I thought perhaps his lordship would appreciate the lease of life, short though it is. Perhaps his apology——”

“Confound it, sir! Do you mean to play with me? Do you think Lord Sparks would apologize to any one—especially to a—a—provincial? This looks like a funk, Captain Colt! I will stand by the word, sir. Do you think you can fool with me?”

“And do you think you can browbeat me, sir?” I said, changing my tone and throwing down the towel while I pulled up my cuffs and advanced a step toward him. “I would have ye know, Captain Rubusto, that you must change your tone. I have spoken to you of special duty—military orders, sir, with which nothing can interfere. So tell his lordship. As for you, I have no time to waste on you. Immediately withdraw your offensive remark hint-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

ing at cowardice, or by the Lord I'll hustle you through the window with scant formality."

His pink face turned pale and he staggered back against the door, throwing up his pudgy hands as if to defend himself.

"Stop, stop, Captain Colt! No violence, sir; no crudity! You said nothing about special duty. I did not mean to be offensive. My position is a delicate one, and——"

"Damned delicate for you, Signor Bombasto," I returned, emboldened by the white feather he showed. "Of course you have a right to protest, but as I am the offended party I have my rights, and know them. I will meet his lordship on Friday morning—not before. You may state the ground."

"As a case of military necessity I must concede the point, I presume," he answered, recovering himself, though his tone was somewhat milder. "His lordship may wish to communicate with you and modify the arrangements. I wish you would name a representative, but perhaps it is not absolutely necessary. Unless you hear from me again you may meet us in the shipyard. It is convenient; it is deserted. We shall not be interrupted."

"It is as good a place as any," I replied, not knowing the location of the place named, and not caring for it; "and now you will excuse me for my irritation. I hope for your further acquaintance."

We shook hands as though nothing had happened to ruffle the interview, and he got himself away with the utmost speed.

I did not feel particularly heroic at the success of my move, but I had gained the necessary time,

FROM PILLAR TO POST

and getting myself in order, followed the officer out, my first business being to procure a suit of Quaker clothing, if possible, my second to obtain information anent the sailing of the *Sprite*, and arrange for the reception of my supposed sister and her maid.

But I soon discovered that a proper suit of Quaker clothing was as impossible to procure on short notice as a general's uniform. My knowledge of the city had never been extensive, and what I had possessed was rendered useless, for through fire and the so-called necessities of war the face of the town was so altered that I barely knew which way to turn to obtain the objects that took me forth. From St. Paul's westward, the district clear to the river was a blackened waste, dotted here and there with a hut made from burned timber and sail-cloth. Whitehall was gone, and farther east lay a region from which a feeble smoke still drifted, despite the flood of the previous evening. Business, save that of the tavern and rumshop, was well-nigh at a standstill, and many a fine residence appeared deserted by its owner and turned into officers' quarters.

I dared not show myself for long in the better portion of the town, but dived into what was left of the labyrinth of lower streets on the lookout for a shop in which I could purchase a fitting costume. In one I found a hat, in another a faded and threadbare coat, clean withal, of a proper drab, and of a material that showed its former owner to have been a Quaker of means. A waistcoat proved to be impossible to obtain, and I was in despair over a lack of short-clothes when I stumbled upon a pair of leather breeches of the finest tanning and of a color that, as

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

a makeshift, would pass. Too many civilians had been reduced to poverty to cause the wearing of these to seem remarkable, and though the costume was of odds and ends, it would not be so incongruous as to excite attention or cause remark. I saw many worse during my walk, and upon those, too, whose faces proclaimed them as at least up to my own class in social standing.

Soldiers and civilians were indiscriminately mixed, but I saw no women unattended save those of the lowest order. There seemed to be much going and coming, but for all the scuffling of feet, for all the bustle, an unnatural calm and silence held over everything—a silence that indicated a deadly blow received by commerce. It was war—war—war. The water-fronts were lined with fortifications, old and new, the latter bristling with cannon, the former (left intact by the colonists when they evacuated the city) already grass grown. Grass grew, too, in the center of nearly all the cross-streets, undisturbed by hoof or wheel. Remains of old barricades stretched, like broken links, athwart many of the great thoroughfares, and wells had been dug without regard to location wherever water seemed likely to be obtained, some yawning, dry and abandoned, others guarded by a single soldier.

About the burned district on the west side there had not been made the first attempt to clear away the *débris*, though the ugly and extensive ruin had existed for nigh two years; neither had any move been made to smoothe the Bowling Green or obliterate the signs of destruction about the pedestal on which had stood the desecrated statue of George III. Ruin

FROM PILLAR TO POST

held sway on all sides, though here and there existed pockets of luxury and elegance, but even to my inexperienced eye New York had been prostrated by a blow the like of which comes to few cities even under bombardment.

The life of the town was centered in Fraunce's tavern. As I went by that hostelry in my quest a few officers were standing about the door. They looked at me, doubtless wondering that one of their ilk should be on the street carrying a portmanteau, and, not to outrage proprieties, I at once hailed a negro and had him follow me, bearing the case. The man proved to be valuable in one other way, for he pointed out the *Sprite* where she lay anchored off the Grand Battery, near Nutten's Island,* and the slip at which I could hire a waterman to take me aboard. The vessel was a trim schooner, as I could well see, with a fine sheer and a saucy lift to her forefoot. A bright-green stripe circled her, and by her rig and rake I knew she could not be of British build. Probably she was an American capture refitted for despatch duty along the coast, and no craft could be swifter or better adapted for the purpose. I caught the glitter of her brass swivel before the foremast, the sun striking from its polished sides, and from the boats at her davits to the flaming speck of bunting hanging at the main peak she appeared in perfect order. Both mainsail and foresail were hoisted, her head-cloths being in stops only, and I knew she was hanging like a hound in leash, waiting for orders and a wind to be off. She was a picture as she lay on

* Governor's Island.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

the flat water, her image fairly reflected in it, her canvas lazily swinging to the small swell (for there was no air stirring), and swift must be the vessel to overtake her when once she heeled to a fresh breeze.

As I went from shop to shop (miserable closet-like repositories for trash), explaining the unusual appearance of a British officer on the plea that the costume was wanted for a masque, I figured how long it would be ere these very spots would be probed in search of me. It was nearly noon by the time I had completed my last purchase, and when my attendant pointed out the vessel on which I hoped to take flight, and I marked her appearance of readiness, I suddenly became aware that I had no more time to lose, as I had yet to get back to the King's Arms and put myself into my disguise before I should dare return and go on board. Until I had seen the Sprite's commander and presented the paper (which was more a command to receive us than a pass) the lady could not go on board, and should any mishap occur to me before this was done Miss Romaine would be in extreme jeopardy.

Therefore I hurried back to the tavern, striking the corner of King Street and the Broadway just as the bell on St. Paul's echoed the midday hour that was struck from the tower of the Dutch church hard by, the negro trailing behind me and I going easily, with an attempt at the indolent swagger that I had marked as common to the vast majority of officers off duty. But the swagger and indolence of air fell from me soon enough and suddenly. I was fairly satisfied with myself and the almost complete success of my adventure, and perhaps the complacency of my

FROM PILLAR TO POST

walk was not all affectation as I swung round the corner and stepped into the shade of the tavern porch. My peculiar relations with my fellow men had implanted a caution that served me to good purpose at this time. Instead of going directly to the door, I stopped and looked between the shutters, which had been half drawn to keep out the glare from the hot roadway. The result may or may not have been well for me, but sitting at a table and talking together I saw two men. None others were in the room. One I recognized as my caller of the morning, Captain Robey. He was in no agreeable mood, but was speaking excitedly, his pink face pinker from the heat of the day and the force of his gestures. Opposite him sat a man of about thirty-five years of age, of magnificent physique and handsome in spite of the plain marks of dissipation on his countenance. He looked with an air of half-contempt at the rotund figure before him, and though to this day I am not certain of his identity, from his shoulder-straps that marked his rank as that of a major, I felt sure that it could be none other than Rothwell. His character (as I read it) fitted him to be a companion of Colt's, and his being at the King's Arms might be explained in a dozen ways. Perhaps he was waiting for his friend. Undoubtedly he had been informed that Captain Colt had not given up his room, and it was likely he had heard of the contemplated duel and had come to offer his services. As for Robey, it is fair to suppose that his lordship had sent him back to me with a protest and an ultimatum. The two had met and were discussing the situation, but so absolutely ruinous would it have been for me to

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

meet the major that by sheer instinct I turned and fled from the porch and back on to the Broadway, the negro attendant following me with all the marks of intense surprise in mouth and eyes.

For a moment or two I was fairly panic-stricken, and aimlessly turned my steps up the highway, walking rapidly that I might put myself as far as possible from the dreaded presence of the man I took to be Rothwell, though I would have done no less to avoid another meeting with the second of Lord Sparks. Without any destination in view, I went on up the sunny avenue, my head in something of a whirl, and ere I was aware I was well opposite the Fields, with the great row of barracks marking its northern limits, the provost prison, the hospital, and the numerous nondescript structures that marred the fair expanse of the level land.

The sweating negro must have thought I had suddenly gone daft from the excessive heat, for I did not halt or really bring myself to calmly consider my next move until I was stopped by a pair of bars which terminated the thoroughfare, and saw before me the great waste of swamp-land and wood-dotted field known as the Lispenard Meadows. Through its center ran the stream from the Collect, and over its range roved the cattle belonging to the British commissary. I here thought it possible to dismiss the negro and go into the shrubbery and change my clothing, but a moment's consideration deterred me. Had I no attendant it might have been feasible, but to discharge the darky under the circumstances would be but to loosen his tongue to any one who would listen, for I was aware that my actions had

FROM PILLAR TO POST

aroused his curiosity sufficiently to cause him to linger within eyeshot of me, and in all his experience he had never seen a British officer climb a fence, portmanteau in hand, and disappear in shrubbery, as if to avoid observation. It was also evident that my advent into the field clad in scarlet would be fraught with a danger hardly less than that from which I had fled, for as I stood looking over the expanse, the neighboring cattle raised their heads and came slowly toward me with no particular evidences of good-will.

It was suddenly borne upon me that it would be useless for me to seek safety in solitude; that my best chance lay among my fellows, and with quick determination I turned and retraced my steps until reaching the Fields. Here I cut across the parade, flanked the King's Arms on the east, went down through Stone Street to William, thence to and along Beaver until I was before Fraunce's Tavern. I would make a bold move. Here I would hire a room, and changing clothes and character, go at once on board the Sprite. I knew of no other place. An obscure hostelry would be dangerous—as dangerous as the custom of an officer was rare—and my knowledge of the whereabouts and character of public houses was too limited to permit a choice. Fraunce's I knew would be safe if I could but once get accommodations.

But here again I met with disappointment; a disappointment that came well-nigh bearing fatal results, and yet, perhaps, its consequences saved both the girl and myself.

The obsequious black host was as bland as oil

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

as he expressed his million regrets that his house was full to overflowing. However, if I would wait for the matter of two hours he would have one apartment vacant, an apartment which, though ill fitted for my lordship, was both comfortable and secure. I was unreasonably irritated by the delay, and politely damned him and his house, as was the fashion, and in order to show my superiority. Through the door of the public room I caught the clatter of knives and forks, and as no one was within hearing but my bag bearer, I talked forcibly, and to such purpose that mine host promised that I should have accommodation within an hour. He opined that I wished to dine, and that if I would take the present opportunity he might have a room for me by the time I finished. The servility of the fellow was slavish. I felt he was playing with me in order not to lose a customer, but being obliged to take him at his word, and feeling that I should be far safer in the coffee-room than on the street, and, moreover, feeling the necessity of stimulant as a bodily demand, I acquiesced, and bidding the negro to guard my portmanteau and report to me the moment I could be accommodated, I went into the great dining-room.

The large apartment was fairly well filled, but to my content none of the occupants appeared to take notice of me. Not to attract attention, I sat down at the first empty table. It was near the door, a satisfactory circumstance, as I now always had an eye to a way of retreat, and I ordered a pot of porter and the first available copy of the newspaper. Thus ensconced, with the journal before my face, I felt as secure as at any time during that day.

CHAPTER XXV

BANQUO'S GHOST

FOR upward of thirty-six hours I had been under a terrible mental strain, excepting only the short sleep of the night before. I was feeling the effects now—effects brought to a climax by the sight of the supposed Rothwell and the reappearance of Captain Robey. My stomach almost revolted at the thought of food, and the odor from the kitchen was sickening, but the stimulus of the porter lifted me a little, and I ordered a light meal that I might not fail physically.

It was while the waiter was absent that two naval officers entered. Looking about the room, my table came under their observation, and walking up to me they politely asked if the unoccupied part was disengaged. I answered that I was alone, and down they sat and at once opened conversation. They proved to be strangers just arrived from England on the *Asia*, man-of-war, polite, entertaining, and glad to get the ear of one who might give them information regarding the issues of the day. Without being unmannerly I could not hold aloof from them, and we practically dined together. I was toasted by my new acquaintances and toasted them in return, alike glad that I was in no danger from them and that

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

their company had helped to pass the hour that was drawing to a close, as I saw by the great clock on the wall. My back was toward the crowd that now filled the room, the door not being more than twenty feet away. The genial bustle of good-fellowship arose from all sides. Glasses clinked, china rattled, mingling with bursts of wine-enlivened laughter. I had been expecting to see the woolly head of my black retainer peep through the door at any moment, and kept my eye, if not my whole attention, thereon, for now the minutes were becoming valuable, and I had yet much to do. One of the officers had got at the fact that I was familiar with nautical terms and was more or less at home on the sea, and he had begun a veritable three-stranded yarn about an experience on the ocean, to which I listened with all of an expression of interest that I could command. As I thus sat, toying with a half-filled wine-glass with one hand, my chin resting on the other, while from the corner of my eye I kept the entrance in view, I saw the door open slowly and a face was thrust within, much as I looked for a face, but it was not that of my attendant. To all appearances it was the head of a dead man, saving the fact that it moved. The black, bloodshot eyes swept the room with feverish intensity, going from table to table until they came to mine. Then they rested upon me, and for the first time I recognized the fact that I was looking at the face of James Colt—or his ghost. He was as ghastly as if risen from his grave. For one moment he gazed at me, then, as slowly as it had entered, the head withdrew and the door closed.

I could not have moved then to save my life,

BANQUO'S GHOST

but remained with an unaltered smile, apparently listening to the story of the officer, who had evidently seen nothing remarkable in the incident. For a moment my brain was as numb as if I had been stunned, and, in truth, save that I counted the seconds as they passed, even noting the swing of the clock's pendulum, I was in a veritable catalepsy—absolutely paralyzed by shock.

The agony of the moment was something horrible. The moment, I say; undoubtedly many moments passed, for long before my body responded my brain had grown active. Was I dreaming? Had I been stricken or had my cousin found me? If the latter, I must fly; but whence? What was left now but a desperate hand-to-hand encounter with the end assured before the beginning? What was to become of the lady, even if she were not already a victim? Could I but get rid of the deadly sense of physical inanition which seemed to hold me in a vise, I would make a bolt for freedom whatever happened. I must know the worst. As it was, thus fettered, I suffered the agonies of hell. There came to me a horrible fear that I would be lifted helpless from my chair and hanged, a mere limp wreck. I was almost on the point of crying out when by a desperate effort I moved my foot. It unsprung my nervous tension as if a cord had broken, and with a feeling of unspeakable relief I lifted my glass just as a laughing remark terminated the narrative of the officer.

I drank off the wine, and was about to excuse myself when the room door was flung violently open and again my cousin entered, now followed by a couple of soldiers, who drew inside of the room and

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

there stood. Then I swung myself around and looked my enemy in the face. It had been no dream.

Save for a military coat and hat, my cousin was dressed as a civilian, not even wearing a sword; his I had at my side, and instinctively my hand went to its hilt. His face was pale, haggard, and unshaven, but once I caught his eyes all other details faded; those bore the expression of a devil incarnate. As the door swung behind him he took two strides forward, and, folding his arms, stood looking down on me, looking down in the exact attitude in which I had discovered him when he surprised me at home. His teeth were half bared in an evil smile, his broad chest heaved, and under the crook of his left elbow I marked the muzzle of the pistol he held in his right hand. His posture and expression denoted gloating triumph, and as I gazed at him in return I felt that my hour had come. It was no ghost. Somehow he had been released before the time set, and he had hunted me down.

I became conscious that the room had suddenly grown quiet, probably from a mingling of curiosity and surprise at the violent entrance of an armed guard. I was conscious, too, that one of my companions rose to his feet as if to demand an explanation, and somehow I was aware that he looked bewildered as his glance passed between my cousin's face and mine. I heard whispers of wonder all about me, and through my brain there ran wildly a train of events—events of my past life—such as come to a fast drowning man. It seemed an hour that my cousin stood there—an hour of exquisite torture; it was possibly a quarter of a minute. I was aroused

BANQUO'S GHOST

by some one brushing past me and hearing a low exclamation; then a man, an old man, broke from the crowd and went up to Colt.

God! I thought I had gone mad or was dreaming again, for before me stood my uncle. He did not speak or look at me, but his face was as white as my enemy's as he walked up to him and laid his hand on his nephew's shoulder. My cousin turned like a tiger at the interference, and the old gentleman backed away as if repelled. And well he might have been. Colt's eyes, which had been gleaming like a madman's, grew great with horror; his smile faded, his jaw loosened and dropped, and I could see the sweat start out on his cheek, which had suddenly turned yellow. With a feeble exclamation he stepped back, and raising his arm pointed at the silent man before him. For a few seconds he stood thus transfixed, agony working on his countenance; then with a quick transition of expression his eyes began to roll wildly, the pistol dropped from his grasp, and with both hands he clutched at his collar, tearing it clear from his throat. The man was choking, for I marked his useless efforts to speak. He swayed like a falling tree, then with a loud scream went sidewise to the floor, overturning a chair in his descent.

The room was in an uproar in an instant. I heard a babel of voices, the rasping of pushed-back chairs, and hurrying of feet. I was dimly conscious that in the excitement I was ignored in the universal attention given to the fallen man, and scarcely know what happened from that moment until I found myself on the street clutching my uncle firmly by the wrist and pushing him along. I came to my senses then,

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

but hardly had I done so when I heard a call and turned to find my negro carrier hurrying after me, bag in hand. Snatching the portmanteau from him, I flung him a coin and bade him begone, which he appeared not loath to do, for glancing at the gold and then at me, he fled away, and in a moment more I was in Hanover Square.

The quiet of the place was reassuring, and I halted both to recover my breath and prevent the signs of excitement from betraying me to the sentry who was patrolling the front of the Governor's house. The street was sleepily stagnant, and I soon discovered that no pursuit had taken place, very possibly for the reason that my cousin had not had time to denounce me by word or sign ere he was stricken. As we passed the pacing sentry I looked up at the closed shutters of the mansion which but last night had been the theater of unrestricted gaiety, but there was nothing about it that marked any unusual occurrence having recently taken place. As we went from the sight of the soldier I turned to my uncle.

"Where to now?" I asked desperately, speaking to him for the first time.

"Come with me," was his sole answer, and we walked along until, arriving at a small house on Queen Street, he opened the door with a key and pushed me in ahead of him. "It is the house of a friend," he said shortly, as he closed and locked the door. "For a time you are safe. I know nothing of what this means, but we can not put my friend in peril, and we must leave. What have you done?"

I made a short story of the whole matter, he listening eagerly, but at the end he was as feverish

BANQUO'S GHOST

in his desire for me to go as ever I could be. It was evident that Colt's heart had been overcome through surprise and shock at the sight of his uncle, whom he thought dead. To him the ghost of his victim had arisen to abort his plans, but whether or not the royalist had succumbed there was no present telling; if not, there was scant time for me to act, as his recovery would be the signal for a systematic search that would scour the city from one end to the other.

As for my uncle, his story showed a lack of detail in strong contrast to my own. Hardly had Marian left the Brouers' than, overcome with the *ennui* of life in the Dutchman's house, and not hoping to see me again, he had bought a poor horse and jogged quietly into Brooklyn, where he had sold the animal and obtained a pass to go to the city to the house of an old friend. His happening at the tavern was through his desire to see life, and being in no danger, he had indulged his whim and had dined there every day since his arrival. He had not recognized me when I entered, having no expectation of ever seeing me in British regimentals, thinking of me as being in Connecticut. It was not until he had marked his would-be murderer that he knew me, and scenting the danger, though not dreaming of what had happened, he had gone to my cousin from pure impulse and without either the hope or intention of producing the result that followed. The old gentleman ended by piously lifting his hands and eyes to Heaven, averring that it was an intervention of a divine providence.

Our conversation was necessarily hurried, much

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

of it being done while I was dressing, for though I would gladly have rested in the first absolute haven I had found, I dared lose no time, nor was the squire behind me in his haste to get me off. In the circumstance of his recognition by Colt my uncle feared that he would be obliged to leave the city in case the officer was alive. It was his intention, now that his health was restored, to go to Southold as soon as he could procure a horse on which to make the journey. He surprised me by saying that *en route* he would stop at his own home and administer a rebuke to his sister, a rebuke of a nature that would keep her aloof from him for the rest of her life. I asked him if he intended playing the ghost again, but he only smiled, grimly saying that it would depend. I then told him where to find the gold I had hidden, and in return he said he would get it within a week and carry it to Southold, taking with him both Prince and Naney and such small valuables as he could collect, as doubtless his lands would be confiscated when all came out, though the latter seemed to trouble him but little, as he expressed no regret.

“My lad,” said he, “the right will always prevail in the end. Though I may not live to see the finish o’ this war—though I may never see ye again—I am strong in the faith that evil can never be master for long. The firmer yer grip on this belief the sooner ’twill bear fruit. Do no wrong to yerself or another an’ ye will find it yer strongest shield. An’ now, God bless ye an’ the brave lady who is to go with ye. When ye get North again, as ye will, look for me at Southold.”

BANQUO'S GHOST

I embraced him, kissing his rough cheek, and so I left him, taking with me the bag (for appearance's sake), though with nothing in it save a single shirt and a pair of stockings which the old gentleman gave me for a change. Even the pistol was discarded as a dangerous article to be found in the possession of a professed Quaker, and I passed it over to the squire.

CHAPTER XXVI

ON BOARD

"EIGHT bells," or four o'clock, was striking as I stepped on the deck of the *Sprite*. There had been no obstacle or delay in getting aboard. I was impressed by the vessel's size as I neared her, for though I was fairly familiar with seagoing craft, I had never seen a schooner of the evident burden of this one. Neither was I at all familiar with the form that greeted me on my arrival, though an instant of thought would have prepared me for the discipline I might have known existed in all branches of his Majesty's service.

The courtesy shown by the officer of the deck was perfunctory at most, for though the Quakers were, well-nigh to a man, supporters of the parliamentary policy relating to the American colonies, the cool blood and peace-loving spirit of the followers of Fox were not qualities that commanded the respect of men whose profession was war.

But the order in my pocket proved an open sesame to the good graces of the captain—at least so far as treatment went, though he swore with marine elegance that to have a non-combatant land-lubber foisted on him at a time when there was danger of meeting a French cruiser was a piece of folly that

ON BOARD

none but an admiral could commit. He became a trifle mollified, however, when he found I was willing to drink with him, and when after an hour's talk (during which I was alive to every sound about me) he discovered my head was quite as hard as his own, when he found that I was by no means ignorant of the sea and sea terms, and that my supposed sister was young, and, as I expressed it with brotherly pride, "deucedly pretty, withal," then he regained his temper completely (being one-third drunk), and said that after all it might be well to have a smell of earth aboard his schooner, that a lady would grace his table, and that the whole matter was irregular and novel enough to be interesting. Poor Captain Lake-ly! As brave an officer as ever lived; whose one weakness was wine; whose one fault, besides, was the exaggerated self-importance it gave him while he was under its influence. When I asked him when he would sail he said he had his orders and was but waiting for a wind, though there was little chance of getting out before the tide ran ebb, or at about sunset.

And I now thought it would be sunset ere Miss Romaine came aboard. I looked over the bay, dreading the approach of a boat, though just why I dreaded I could not have told. I feared no immediate pursuit, for neither Admiral Digby nor General Clinton had an idea of the identity of Mr. Peter Jackson, their faith in Miss Romaine having made the formality of inquiry and identification unnecessary.

Up the Sound River several great ships were swinging at anchor, and I guessed they were part of

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

the fleet that was to sail—and it did sail that night—to the relief of Pigot at Newport. A scurry of boats was going between them and the shore, transporting the troops. The broad stream lay like glass under the westering sun. The scarred city looked peaceful at this distance, the Dutch red-tiled roofs, a prominent feature of the town, showing with rich contrast against the billowy green of the yet standing trees. Over all rose the spires of the remaining churches—emblems of God over a godless community, giving no hint of the pride, rapacity, cruelty, and suffering they looked down upon. Nutten's Island was a mass of shrubbery, through which showed the freshly turned earth of the new fortifications. The heights of Brookland rose like a low green mountain, topped here by a breastwork, there by a white residence, the whole shimmering in duplicate on the mirror of the flat water. It was a beautiful scene. For all that the air was hot and still it was not oppressive, and not a cloud flecked the sky, though the blue was clipped by the crescent of a young moon—a silver sickle that would presently turn to gold through the alchemy of night.

The quiet of the surroundings, the low tones of the officers and noiseless gliding of the men forward, came like a balm to my lately hurried heart. The wine I had just drunk also tended to soothe me, and if Marian would but come aboard I should have little left to worry about save a lack of wind to blow us away from the inferno lying under the deceitful mask of a lovely summer evening.

The sun was just balancing, a great hot ball on the crest of purple made by the Jersey hills, when

ON BOARD

the girl arrived. She came with but little more baggage than I had brought, but even in the distance I knew it must be she, for the huge figure of the black giantess loomed big in the small boat that came alongside, the weight of the negress bringing the gunwale perilously near to the edge of the water. In her Quaker hood the maiden was exquisitely pretty, and she bore herself with a demeanor totally at variance with her natural character. She did not offer to shake hands with me, but took in my costume from top to toe with a flash of her eye, and her greeting showed she held her self-possession in perfect command. Perhaps, too, it was to convey to me the information that we were companions by circumstance—a circumstance that would not permit more than the barest of brotherly attention; there was to be no brotherly presumption.

“Well, Peter, thee are here! I feared thee would dawdle. Why could thee not have sent me word that thee was aboard? There, thee need not touch my hand. Show Nancy where she is to bide. Oh, what a big ship! What a white floor! Is yonder the master? Take me to him.”

She courtesied to Captain Lakely with the prettiest grace, her face as innocent as a baby's. I saw the officer's eyes open in surprise as she placed her mitted hand in his.

“Surely I have seen the likeness of Mistress Jackson elsewhere than on my deck,” he said, bowing low as her undeniable beauty struck him.

“La! Then I must be commonplace, for I am sure I have never met thee, sir,” she returned, blushing under the open admiration of his eyes.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"Nay, madam," he returned gallantly, "your distinguished beauty would mark you anywhere. Where have you lived?"

"Oh! We have been visiting the Pembertons," she answered brightly and without the least hesitation. "Perhaps thee knows the Pembertons. Patience Pemberton was a Colewell. She lived on Staten Island for a piece—with her aunt, who was a Baxter. Perhaps you know the Baxters. She was a Hull, thee knows—not a Friend; but she came to New York and married Percy Pemberton, and then joined the Society—they both joined—and lately young Percy went to Savannah, and I met him there. He took such a fancy to brother Peter that he invited us North for the summer, and he hates to have us go back, but we must. We did not know traveling was so hard."

The lady spun this off in so straightforward a way that to me it proved its thorough rehearsal, albeit it was spoken so rapidly that if the officer followed her his wit was wonderfully sharpened. It was evident that the last words were the only ones that appealed to him, for he was smiling at her simplicity as he said:

"No, i' faith! I have no knowledge of the Pembertons, but I'll bless Percy for a lucky man, though heart-broken this day. I'll wager the pivot forward that he returns the visit shortly. By God, he's a fortunate dog! And he took a desperate fancy to Peter—ha? Well, by the mark! and I have suddenly an eye to Peter myself."

He laughed heartily, his bronzed cheek growing ruddier than the wine had made it; then turning

ON BOARD

to the four officers who stood within earshot, he proceeded to introduce them by name, ending with:

“And now, gentlemen, this lady and her brother are to receive your distinguished attention. Mistress Jackson, I was in haste to end the trip, but my present prayer is that it be prolonged.”

The laugh that followed this pointed compliment would have embarrassed another woman. Though it was not to the taste of the supposed little Quakeress, she showed no confusion, but courtesied with the pleased expression of an unsuspecting and flattered girl.

“La, gentlemen, I am unused to such brave gallantry and manners. Peter, thee may take me to my room. I am tired and hot, and oh, so hungry!”

I went toward her, but, not to lose his opportunity, the captain himself stepped forward and insisted on doing the honors, at the same time bidding an officer direct the boatswain to attend to the disposition of the negress, who had stood like a tower throughout the proceedings—a tower which, I was well assured, would fall heavily on any one who molested her charge.

I did not see the girl again until late in the evening, and then at the table, where she remained but a short time, and then retired to her berth. I knew she was waiting for an opportunity to speak to me, but wondered how she could bring it about, for the vessel, though large for a schooner and rendered roomy from the fact that the bulk of the space between decks had been made for the accommodation of officers and men, was but a circumscribed area in

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

which to move, and for us to converse without danger of being overheard seemed impossible.

And yet the lady managed it later, as she appeared capable of managing any situation not requiring brute force. I had given up seeing her that night, however, and was looking at the first officer as he tramped across the space of quarter-deck yclept the "poop," swearing at the protracted and remarkable calm. The captain was below. Our anchor-light twinkled like a great star, the outlying fleet furnishing a constellation of sparkling dots. It had just gone "two bells," or nine o'clock, and the music of the chime floated out from the different ships, drifting over the water with exquisite effect. The moon was sinking and the peace of heaven was over everything. I was wondering if the wind would ever rise, when Nancy lifted her huge bulk through the companionway and said that Miss Marian was sick and would like to see me.

The start I gave at the intelligence proved to be unnecessary, for the black led me to Miss Romaine's berth and shut the door behind her, and in the light of the small gambrel swung lamp I saw the lady, fully dressed, awaiting my coming with a bright smile. She gave me her hand cordially enough now, bidding me to sit on the box, while Nancy filled a third of the remaining space.

"You see the advantage of being your sister, Mr. Chester, but I must not overdo the part. Is there anything new?"

I told her of the appearance of Colt and the providential interposition of my uncle in the tavern; and during the recital I marked her eyes grow big with

ON BOARD

wonder and her hand go to her heart as if its beating distressed her. It was only through interest, though, and not fear, but so well did I picture the incident that even Nancy gripped her ham-like fist, and I guessed what was passing through the mind of the slave. In return, the lady told me she had allowed her guardian to believe that she was going to spend the day with a friend—a thing she often did—and as her absence was in no way unusual there would be no wonder on the score of her non-return. Colt might have called at the Governor's house for all she knew, but she doubted it. The Governor had been ill from the result of the dissipation of the previous night, and would not have seen him anyway. As for herself, she had left the house early in the day. It was fairly evident to her that my cousin had more of an eye to personal vengeance on me than a desire to expose Annie Kronje, even, perhaps, being willing to shield her for a purpose; but as before, his hot temper and poor judgment had cost him dearly. If he had succumbed, and if I had struck Chandler hard enough, there would be no necessity for our flying to Charleston save for the fact that undoubtedly Josephine Cowan knew the whole story—Josephine, who, she said, would rejoice at my downfall, and through feminine jealousy would not be heart-broken to know that Marian Romaine had been humbled. I was about to assure her that Miss Cowan would not take steps against me—for I had not related my last experience with that lady—when it struck me it would be too long a story to tell then, and, for me, rather an awkward one. The interview ended by her saying that she would pretend to be sea-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

sick in case she was not really so, because she desired to keep from the ken of the captain, whom she remembered to have met once somewhere, though that officer's recollection was too uncertain to lead him to suspect the truth. I might call at her berth once a day and learn of her welfare, which would be but a brotherly duty, she said, with a charming smile. To call oftener would not be prudent; she would send for me, if necessary. She held out her hand, and allowed me to press her fingers to my lips, after the courtly fashion of the time (a fashion which, alas, I have lived to see pass away), and with the hand she gave me a smile in farewell—a smile and a look that quickened my pulse, and I made an inward oath that no harm should befall her until I had first been trampled down.

And so I left her, with a warmth about my heart quite new to me, simply saying that my berth was opposite her own, and on going to the deck again I answered the inquiry of the officer to the effect that my sister was suffering from a headache, but would not need the services of the doctor.

CHAPTER XXVII

A SEA TRAGEDY

SOME time during the night I was awakened by hearing the anchor chain coming in link by link through the hawse-hole, and later heard the rattle of blocks as the head-sails were hoisted. It was pitch dark, and I was too comfortable and needed the rest too much to get up and go on deck, so I turned over and fell into a heavy slumber—the last I was to have for some time—and was finally aroused by the ship's bell as it chimed off six strokes announcing the hour of seven.

When I went on deck the sun was shining as through a mist, though the sky was clear save for a myriad of mare's tails with delicate feathery ends blowsing athwart the heavens as if blown out by a strong cross wind. The air was languid, coming out of the south in fitful puffs, and I knew we were in for a change of weather at no distant date. We were then beating down the Jersey coast and were off the Highlands, the white beach of Sandy Hook gleaming fairly over the starboard quarter. The sea ran in long, low swells, barely ruffled by the wind—a swell that might easily try the stomach of a landsman, and would prove an excuse for the lady to remain below. I saw the negress, who told me her mistress

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

was still sleeping, and so I reserved the single visit I was allowed until evening, that, with childish economy of pleasure, I might have something to look forward to during the day.

From the hour I stepped aboard the schooner to the end of my experience with her I do not believe a soul of the regular company had a suspicion of the true character of her passengers. Personally, I was at once advanced to comradeship by the ward-room officers, this being possible through my efforts to be entertaining, through the pass signed by a personage so exalted as Admiral Digby, and the possession of a beautiful sister, the last reason probably having the greatest weight. Since my landing on Long Island, more than a month previous, I had not known such unalloyed, restful pleasure—a time so devoid of menace of every sort—as during the first few hours of our flight toward the South. I drank in the beauties of the great sea I love so well, albeit I knew its smiles were deceitful and likely to turn to frowns with little warning—that we do not control it, but live on it through sufferance.

In absolute indolence I passed the day, the schooner bowing herself along slowly as the bosoming swells swept under her. We made little headway, for the wind fell to a breath that failed to take the burnish from the rolling seas, and by two o'clock we lost even that, and still we were within sight of the blue Highlands of the Shrewsbury. Even the long, polished bars of undulating water seemed to catch the universal sluggishness that rested on nature, and by four o'clock we were beset by as flat a calm as it has ever been my lot to experience. The sun

A SEA TRAGEDY

still shone, though it was but a watery eye in a dome of grayish white, for the blue had disappeared and the shadows of spar and rigging were meager and illy defined as they fell across the white deck. Not a sail was in sight save one pearly speck far to the east, which the glass resolved into a three-master with towering canvas, her hull being below the horizon. Doubtless it was a man-of-war—one of the fleet that had gone toward Newport by the outside route.

Captain Lakely came on deck about five o'clock, remarking that the glass was falling rapidly, and expressing the wish that he was farther off the coast. He glanced shrewdly at the useless canvas and around the wide ring of the sea, and I noticed then that the distant sail had disappeared as suddenly as if the waters had engulfed it, though it had been in sight for upward of two hours, and I had looked at it not three minutes before. I knew it to be but the effect of the closing in of the horizon, and this was a portent not to be ignored.

And here I made a very common mistake—one that I should have been too wise to commit—that of making a suggestion when suggestion was not my business. Presuming on the easy grace of the man, I remarked to the captain that the set squaresail would become a source of danger should the wind come suddenly from the south, and with that he turned on me like a flash, swelling as if I had insulted him by questioning his ability to attend to the safety of his own vessel. His violence was so uncalled for that I looked at him in wonder, and saw that he had been drinking. I apologized for my mistake, at which he at once appeared mollified and tried

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

to soften the effect of his harshness by asking me to join him in a bottle of port, and later suggested that, as the sea was smooth, he would consider it an honor if my sister would grace the table with her presence that evening.

And this she did at my earnest request, I pressing the matter as much on the ground of policy as from my own desire to feast my eyes on her. The table was as level as if on land, and the meal passed off gaily, albeit I thought there was overmuch wine drunk by all hands, save Marian and myself. She might have been a queen, so great was the deference paid to her, though the compliments were a trifle too pointed for good taste; but the way she bore herself, the unsuspecting simplicity of her replies, her palpable lack of sophistication, the womanly ignorance of her questions anent marine affairs, and the "thees" and "thous" that slipped from her tongue in apparent forgetfulness of the character of the company, showed me that never for a moment did she lose her self-possession or forget the part she was playing. Her sweetness in including her entertainers individually in her smiles and the absolute way in which she ignored me save to call on me to corroborate some naïve statement, would have been humiliating had I not understood the depth of her art. Later, the captain, who had plainly succumbed to the girl's beauty, insisted she should go on deck, offering his gold-laced arm with a flourish and walking a trifle unsteadily as he handed her up the companion steps.

I was astonished at the unusual dusk at that hour, and marked with quick apprehension that not a cloth

A SEA TRAGEDY

had been touched. The heavy squaresail still hung braced as it had been when the last puff died, and the full spread of canvas swung lazily to the light motion of the hull, every rag set from the flying jib to the immense gaff-topsail on the mainmast, the reefing-points rippling delicately to the flow of the quiet seas.

In the face of the falling glass and the undeniable threat of the weather, it was a marvel how Captain Lakely could be so blind as to allow unreefed canvas to hang out in this fashion, and that, too, with every sheet belayed. I did not wonder long, however, for hardly had we gained the deck when he took a seat by the side of the girl, and with tipsy confidence mingling with an air of great conceit, the latter evidently intended to impress her, informed us that he had been used to deep water and had no respect for a fore-and-aft rig or a vessel that moved like a chip and would sail on a heavy dew. He said he had been a second officer on board of one of his Majesty's ships of the line, but had been degraded as the result of a quarrel with his superior. This was his first trip on the *Sprite*, and probably his last, as he had been promised reinstatement shortly. Being now extremely good-natured from the effects of the wine, he spoke lightly of my suggestion about the squaresail, and, turning to me, said he would show a Quaker how to carry canvas in a blow. At which the girl curled her lip, as I could see, for she sat in the shaft of light that shot from the cabin, and remarked that "brother Peter," though well meaning, perhaps, was too talkative "by much," and ended by sending me below for her shawl, as it was becom-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

ing chilly. I was about to put the light fabric around her shoulders, but she waved me off with cool indifference and handed it to the captain, who, betwixt this preference and his wine-heated passion, well-nigh made a fool of himself as he hovered over her.

After that I went to the larboard rail, well out of earshot, and not at all content with the appearance of things. The low voices just reached me, but the sound only seemed to intensify the stillness. It had grown so dark by this that the upper cloths of the immense mainsail seemed to vanish into space, the peak being far out of sight. Forward I caught the glow of a pipe, and could just make out the great boom of the foresail as it swung lazily to the limits of its sheet. Not a star shone, neither did the moon—now near its setting—pierce the thick vapor that had settled overhead. As for the sea, ink could not be blacker. Once in a while I caught a smooth, oily swirl, as if light was reflected from somewhere, but the hellish, ebony depth was like some waiting monster. An indefinable sobbing seemed to come from aloft, a sound as if giant wings were beating the air. I shivered, though I was not chilly. For a moment or two I fancied we were not floating, but hanging in space, the surface of the black ocean as far below as was the black sky above; indeed, in all my experience on the sea (and I have had not a little) I never knew such a palpable pall of darkness, nor had my nerves less under control than on that August night.

I noticed now that the air was cooling rapidly, though there was not a breath strong enough to blow my pipe smoke off the deck. I whipped

A SEA TRAGEDY

my finger into my mouth and held it aloft a dozen times, but there was not the faintest indication of a breeze. And yet the coldness came pouring in as if it settled from aloft. I stepped to the binnacle and noted that we were headed southwest by south, and as I was feeling my way back to the monkey-rail the watch struck "five bells," or half past ten, and then Miss Marian called me sharply and told me to take her below.

I did so, lighting her lamp for her, as her berth was pitch dark and Nancy nowhere about, and was rewarded with a good-night smile that did not raise my spirits as it should have done.

As I passed through the cabin again I marked the second officer step up to the barometer, then turn and hurry to the deck, where I followed, and in the glow from the companionway saw him go up to the captain and speak. Lakely turned and went below, and from pure curiosity I craned my neck and looked through the oval window of the cabin house. He tapped the glass with his knuckles, peering at the register as if his eyes troubled him, then stepped to the sideboard and, pouring out a stiff draft of brandy, drank it neat at a swallow, after which he came to the foot of the steps and called up.

"Mr. Hazen, you may take in the squaresail and single reef the main and fore; she will have to stand that. Keep a good offing, and call me if aught happens. I am going to turn in."

"Aye, sir," was the reply, and Captain Lakely went to his room. In a moment after I heard the order to shorten sail, and a pattering of bare feet came aft.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

It was then that I caught a sound far in the distance—a sound between a hiss and a roar. It came from fairly over the bow and advanced with a rapidity and growing volume that was astounding. Though I had never heard its like before I knew it was the wind smiting the sea, and ere a hand was laid to a halyard it was upon us.

In an instant the schooner, taken fair aback, settled down as will a horse suddenly reined in when going at full speed. For a space she forged astern, her taut rigging shrieking like fiends, the appalling blackness of the night magnifying the hideousness of the situation. Under the force of the pressure I was pushed rearward, the breath being driven from my body, until caught by the broad wheel, at which I clutched desperately for fear of being blown over the taffrail. For a moment the vessel hung, trembling as if each beam was under a heavy hammer, and above the hellish roar of the squall I heard the thunder of the great sails above me. Not a shout reached my ears. I remember feeling the grip of the helmsman on my collar as he hauled me to my feet; I remember seeing Captain Lakely come bounding up the steps, but at that instant there came a crash as if the forward pivot-gun had been fired, and the foremast went backward, falling along the main starboard shrouds, sheering them apart like pack-threads. With this the vessel paid off toward the west, bringing the mainsail with its belayed sheet flat to the blast. As we heeled to it, there came a second crash, and down came the maintopmast with its smother of canvas, the spar smiting the deck not ten feet from me with the sound of an explosion, and

A SEA TRAGEDY

in the light from the cabin I marked Lakely go down, entangled in the middle of the mess. Then the vessel surged on its beam's ends under the tremendous pressure offered by the mainsail itself.

All this happened in a breath, and though the darkness prevented me from seeing much of it, I knew what had occurred as well as if it had been day, and the light of dawn bore out the truth of my supposition.

There was no sea on as yet, and, indeed, such a wind would have smoothed a mountain of billows. A sudden shimmer overspread the face of the deep, and I saw it was as white as milk, as smooth as marble, from the flying spoondrift that hid its surface. Even at the fearful angle she was on the wrecked vessel gathered way, until from the situation of her single remaining sail she gradually worked into the wind's eye, and there righting, hung trembling and groaning like a terrified animal waiting but an instant to dash in a new direction. If she now paid off eastward, the remaining mast would go by the board in a twinkling as the starboard shrouds had gone, and I instinctively whirled the helm to hard a-larboard, the man at my side following my efforts as if his thoughts were my own.

At that moment the wind steadied, though its weight appeared none the less, and as the vessel began to pay off again in the hoped-for direction the sailor at my elbow shouted in my ear:

"Thank God, ye be here, sir! I fear every man aft is floored save we two. Hold her as she goes for a bit."

With this he drew his knife and stepped toward

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

the boom traveler, and the next instant I marked the great sail flash to leeward, and the craft righted in a volley of reports from the loosened canvas. He had cut the main-sheet.

At once the pressure on the helm relaxed, and I saw the fellow run along the larboard quarter and toward the trembling mast. I marked the light on his legs as he sped by the cabin house, and in a few moments down came the sail on a run, and with the canvas dragging overboard we lay, a useless log, in the trough of the sea that was already beginning to rise.

The manner of the coming of the great storm of August, 1778, was as unusual as it was severe. Within the tropics such sudden violence might have been looked for, but in the latitude of the forties an outburst that partook of the nature of a typhoon was as much out of place as would have been an iceberg had it sailed into New York harbor in mid-summer. History tells us how many a tall ship went to destruction through the fiendish power of that unexpected wind, even when it had been prepared for tempest, and that we were not immediately overwhelmed (being struck with every sail standing) was due somewhat to our position, but more to the weakness of the foremast and maintopmast. Certain it was that we were not helped through any foresight of Captain Lakely, who now lay stunned and perhaps dead under the muck of the fallen spar and its gear.

For the first few moments after the breaking forth of the storm I was too bewildered to do more than instinctively throw over the wheel, though I

A SEA TRAGEDY

seemed to know the nature of each disaster as it occurred. Yet through it all the thought of the girl below was paramount, and as the vessel righted when relieved of its last sail and began to lurch in a sea that I knew would soon roll us under unless the wreck was cleared, I let go my hold on the wheel, and, skirting the mass of the fallen top-hamper, ran down the companionway, passing the third officer, who came from his berth clad only in undershirt and drawers, evidently aroused from his watch below.

The cabin lamp was swinging wildly, but its light was steady. Every joint in the craft was groaning a protest as I rapped loudly on the berth door of my companion, but I received no answer to my knocks and repeated calls. Being sure that disaster had befallen the girl, I tried the door. It was locked, but without hesitation I put my shoulder to it and forced it in. Her lamp was extinguished, but the light from the cabin showed me the maiden lying on the floor rolling helplessly from side to side with the vessel's motion. She was unconscious, and by the blood on her face I knew she had been made so by a blow—probably from being thrown down when we were cast on our beam's ends. I gathered her up in my arms, and stood steadying myself by a grip on the bunk as I shifted the senseless girl to her narrow bed. She was entirely dressed, as the shock had come within five minutes after I had left her room, and I thanked God that she had not remained on deck, for the spot where she had been sitting was directly under the mass that had fallen from above.

I stood by her, holding her with one hand and bracing myself with the other, when Nancy appeared

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

at the door, her black face green from fright, her eyes like saucers. With a groan she toppled forward, already in the miseries of seasickness, and shouting above the infernal din that she must pull herself together and hold her mistress from falling from the bunk, I waited long enough to get a terrified nod, then turned to the deck to bear a hand on the overhanging wreck that was banging against the schooner's sides, and which I knew would beat the vessel to the bottom unless it was at once cut away. Two or three ship's lanterns were flitting forward, and I heard the dull blows of axes as the men worked on the wreckage. There was a smother of white water all about, and the wind that came over the rail was like a living thing, the spoondrift, borne on its wings, striking my face and stinging like small shot. I was about to move forward when, to my unspeakable relief, I felt the blast gradually shift to the bow and the vessel's roll change to a pitch, by which I guessed the mess had shifted forward, and being moored to the hulk by a network of fallen lines, was acting as a sea-anchor, for we were now riding across the seas instead of wallowing in them.

Knowing, then, that I was useless on deck, I went below, only to find that Nancy had collapsed and was on the floor in a corner, a miserable heap. The girl, now conscious, was holding on to the woodwork, though there was little danger of her being thrown from her bed. As she saw me enter the room she half lifted herself, her pale, blood-streaked face making her look pitiable. With a total abandonment of conventionality she held out her disengaged hand to me and tried to smile bravely, but the gesture

A SEA TRAGEDY

was that of a child seeking comfort, and I kissed the fingers she gave me; then wetting a cloth, made a shift at cleaning the wound in her temple and washing the stains from her face.

Not a word did she say, which to me was a marvel, as I had expected a volley of questions anent our danger and all that had happened; but words were almost impossible, and the sudden leaps the schooner took anon were fit to lift a man's heart into his throat, let alone a woman's.

All the rest of that night I sat by the side of the girl, her hand in mine, the great negress crouched on the floor, once in a while lifting up her voice in supplication or giving vent to a groan as the intensity of her nausea was augmented. At times Miss Romaine seemed to sleep, but again I would catch her blue eyes fastened on me when there came a more than usually violent lurch, and I would press her hand reassuringly and smile when a smile was a lie, at which she would close her eyes again. I was keenly alive to every sound and motion of the vessel, both of which increased as the hours went by, and when, as daylight struggled with the flame of the yet burning lamp, I saw the third officer stagger down to his room, I dropped the hand of the girl and, telling her I would return shortly, went to the deck.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ON THE WRECK

THE appearance of the sea was beyond description. The waves were avalanches of water, their steeps weltering in foam, their tops, torn by the wind, streaming to leeward like smoke. The gray dawn brought out the livid green masses that hurled themselves from ahead as if each would engulf the hapless vessel. Anon a surge would curl above the stump of the broken bowsprit and come aboard, a smooth green sea, driving the bows fairly under, and then come thundering down the deck as far as the break of the poop, whence it poured off through the shattered bulwarks. Slowly the hulk rose under the gigantic weight of brine and seemed to shake her head at the stunning impact. How she still lived was a mystery to me. The low clouds, folded line upon line, lay a dark lead-color, and under them sailed great rags of swiftly moving vapor charged with rain that rattled down in slanting lines like gusts of buck-shot. Beyond cutting away the *débris* of the foremast, which, floating to windward, now held the vessel's nose to the seas, little had been done. In fact, there was little more to do. The main-boom had been hauled inboard and the sail fastened roughly in stops, but the wreck of the topmast lay where it had fallen.

ON THE WRECK

Of the four boats carried, but two remained—one still at the larboard davits, the other bottom up under the break of the poop, the latter in danger of being washed away in one of the boarding seas. The galley-house was gone, and the only projections that arose above the devastated deck forward were the forecastle hatch, which was closed to keep out the flood, the brass gun, its luster gone, and the ragged stump of the foremast that projected some fifteen feet. Ten men were crouched on the larboard side of the cabin house, thoroughly drenched, and blue from cold and anxiety.

The utter wretchedness of it all, aside from the danger, made my heart sink within me. As I was about to work toward the group to get what news I could, the man who had held the helm with me saw me, and leaving the rest, gripped his way along to where I stood braced near the companion.

“An’ so ye have hung on, sir?” he bawled. “I thought ye gone when I missed ye. But we be but little better off than the rest.”

“What of the rest?” I shouted back.

“Every hossifer save Mr. Belding went with the foremast, either swept over or crushed. Eight men were in the for’ard riggin’. ’Twas bein’ at th’ wheel that saved me, sir.”

He wiped the flying brine from his eyes with the back of his hairy hand.

“Captain Lakely is under the ruck,” I returned at the top of my lungs, as I pointed at the tumbled mass of the top-hamper. “I saw him struck down when it fell.” The man started and stared at me. “I am free to use my tongue now,” I continued,

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

“and I aver his fate is but a judgment against him.”

“By the Lord! sir, but ye be right, though I am not so free as ye. Of all the crazy ways o’ carryin’ cotton, the beat o’ last night would be hard to find. I knowed it, but, bless ye, sir, I looked for none o’ the likes o’ this. Here we be drivin’ starn on to th’ Nassau beach, and naught between but th’ Almighty an’ white water. There lies a wet hell in store for us, I fears me, sir. ’Ere comes Mr. Belding; would ye mind tellin’ him of th’ captain?”

The man went back hand over hand to his place among his fellows as if loath to be caught so far aft, just as Mr. Belding, the third officer, gained the deck, bearing a bottle of rum in his hand. I told him briefly that Captain Lakely was beneath the fallen topsail, and after serving the men with a glass of liquor apiece, he ordered the mass to be overhauled. Under the thickest of it, pinned down by the broken spar, was the officer who had paid so heavy a price for his ignorance or foolhardiness. He was stone dead, his skull having been crushed. The body was taken to the cabin, and then Mr. Belding informed me that two of his fellow officers had been swept overboard with the *débris* of the foremast and a third, the doctor, found dead in the scuppers. Eight men had been aloft when the mast went down, and every soul of them was lost. The young fellow was fairly dazed by shock, as well he might have been, and remarked that there was small need of launching the remains of the captain overboard, as the vessel was like to prove a coffin for all of us and would be a fitting one for his superior. This was a

ON THE WRECK

veiled allusion to the captain's lack of seamanship, but as the officer made no further reference to it I made no return, save to ask him what he purposed doing. He said that it was his duty to save the lives of those remaining on board, if it was possible. Now that the vessel was a wreck and in danger of foundering, he would abandon the hull as soon as the sea moderated so that a boat could live in it. The chances of being picked up were slight, indeed, but he thought he might get the survivors back to harbor, as we had not gone far on our way, and the northern drift of the wreck would be amazing.

I agreed with him about the rapid drift, but had my doubts as to the easy foundering of the schooner. I told him that, in my opinion, the wreck would float for days, having no cargo aboard, but that in all likelihood we should go to pieces on the outer bar of Long Island beach unless the wind changed or the storm ceased.

But the storm did not cease, as hoped for. The unprecedented gale continued that day and the next, and the sun of the second day went down in as thick a shroud of flying storm-rack, in as howling a hurricane of wind and rain, as at any moment since its destructive breath broke loose. Details of the time are well beyond me, nor do I regret their loss. By the morning of the third day I had become absolutely hopeless, as had all hands. The strained timbers had opened seams in the bottom, and betwixt them and that portion of the flood that drained in from above, the vessel grew logy. She no longer met the boarding seas with a quick and buoyant lift of her head. The well showed six feet of water in her hold,

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

and twice I had seen a rat scurrying up the companionway—a harbinger of disaster that commands the respect of every sailor. I can not tell the horrors of that time. The wind met one like a wall. The sky was laced by gusts of heavy rain, and the insistence of motion and the roar of water seemed to have got into my blood. A deadly and continuous nausea laid hold of even the stoutest sailor; half the remaining crew was prostrated and lay about the cabin floor in all the abandon of extreme misery, and I had come to fear the death that seemed certain as little as I looked for rescue.

On the evening of the second day the body of the captain was put overboard with little preparation and no ceremony, and at midnight the negress died either from fright, exhaustion, or the giving way of some weakened organ, for I discovered her lifeless on the very spot where she had fallen two days before, and in the same attitude of crouching terror. She was sent after the captain with decency, though with despatch.

Of food and drink we had plenty, for the vessel was well stored; but though the drink was in demand, I fancy little food was taken by any one, and as for myself, I do not remember eating a mouthful, though mayhap I did.

The girl lay as if carved in stone, only her eyes giving signs of animation. It seemed months at a time that I sat by her side holding her hand, and it was shortly after the burial of Nancy that another epoch of my life began. In a half stupor I was sitting by Miss Romaine, for now I played the brother in earnest, and was almost constantly with her, though I

ON THE WRECK

rarely spoke to her and more rarely heard her voice. Something, I know not what, made me look at her—a twitching of her hand or a murmur—and I thought by the expression of her face that she was dying. The sudden terror that smote me awakened me from a lethargy that was becoming fixed, and also waked me to the fact that I had been living for her as much as for myself. A great gulf yawned before me, and in the face of it even the hell of the elements sank into insignificance. Was this to be the end? Was it for this I had sacrificed myself under the disguise of doing my duty? I do not think I made a sound, but I uttered a mental groan that must have been heard in heaven; it was all the prayer I had.

The brandy I forced between her blue lips revived her, and as intelligence again came to her eye she tried to smile, then in a moment she whispered, “God’s will be done.”

Oh, my lady brave! If she, lying there, could smile and trust, why could not I? I read my lesson quickly, and bent down and kissed her, for comfort, perhaps, the sudden relief, or weakness, or both, bringing a gust of tears from me. At this she laid her poor white hand on my forehead and looked at me, then with a great effort she wound her arms around my neck, drawing my face against hers, and whispered: “It will be all right, John. God’s will be done. Does he ever do aught wrong?”

I might have died then in comfort, but by the Almighty’s goodness, being reserved for greater happiness, I lived, though I shall never forget that moment when, thus silently, we bared our hearts—when we passed them each to the other. Storm and stress

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

had done in two days what sunshine might never have accomplished.

I think it was from that moment matters mended—mended for us, I mean, though it hurried others to a bitter end, and, indeed, the end of all seemed near. As the dawn of the third day broke Marian appeared better. The nausea suddenly left her, though she was yet lamentably weak, and lay in her bunk like a tired child. It was plain that the storm was moderating, and though the wind was still strong, it had lost its terrible weight and blew less steadily. The sea continued to run in great hills, but their tops were no longer made ragged by the gale. There was a wonderful lift to them, too—a lift that spoke of shallowing water, and when, after giving the maiden a spoonful of jelly and a sip of stimulant, I stepped over the recumbent forms of the men on the cabin floor and went to the deck, I saw Belding looking astern with a new light in his eye. The sun was just over the horizon, peeping through a break in the clouds, a streak of pearly blue above it heralding a change of weather, its rays giving a strange effect to the waters as they tipped the huge seas, leaving the hollows somber. But there, directly in our lee lay the coast, and now so near that without a glass I plainly marked the hell of white water that boiled over the bar and flung its spume into the air. As a surge lifted us, from its pinnacle I could make out the green of the land and the purple of the more distant hills. The officer shut his telescope with a snap that betokened a new spirit.

“Mr. Jackson, we are yet afloat, but yonder lies a foe there is no flanking. Thank God! the gale is

ON THE WRECK

fast breaking; by noon we can take to the boats, and it is our only chance of rescue. We are not far from New York Bay. I think I recognize Five Islands." *

I took the glass from him and looked long. Five Islands it was beyond doubt. The Great South Bay stretched beyond the white tumble that fringed the coast, like a blue lake, and I could almost pick out the scrub oak, tree by tree, that found root on the sapless soil of the westernmost islet. Beyond my astonishment at the wonderful leeway we had made I was impressed by the fact that my efforts at escape had been well-nigh useless, for we were being driven back to my starting-point. Five Islands was barely ten miles from my uncle's house. I ran the glass along and saw the hole known as "Jones's Inlet," with the surf boiling through the narrow passage, though the whole line of beach was half obscured by a mist of spray tossed from the tumultuous waters. I closed the instrument and handed it back.

"Will thee tempt the sea in an open boat?" I asked, not forgetting my assumed character, and with a quick resolve not to be taken back to New York.

"I would tempt hell before I would be flung into that fury yonder, sir," he said, pointing toward the coast.

"The schooner might live to be beached, Mr.

* The present name of "Fire Island" is a corruption of the old title. One hundred years ago the now continuous sand dune or bar was pierced by four straits, making five small islands, on which was considerable stunted shrubbery. They were sometimes called "Seal Islands."

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

Belding," I returned. "It is not a rocky coast. I think I would rather trust myself in her than risk an open boat. These remaining are but cockle-shells in such a seaway. Thee would never reach New York; thee could never ride such a surf as runs astern of us; nor could thee regain the vessel once thee are fairly off. Thee would be crushed like an egg-shell."

"The schooner will strand and go to pieces on the outer bar," he answered in a tone of conviction that showed me he had considered the matter. "She will break the moment she finds the bottom. She is already logged with water, and may founder before she reaches the breakers."

"Can thee not lighten her by the pumps?" I ventured. "Thee has the hands, and the sea will now permit. Thee may command me, sir, as thee would one of thy own men."

"You take a landsman's view, Mr. Jackson. We should be in the thick of yonder muss before we gained a foot on the water below. Besides, sir, I know my duty. If, as you say, you put yourself under my orders, I must insist that you be ready to leave the ship—you and your sister—by noon at the latest. I wish to have plenty of blue water between me and that white boil yonder."

"I consider myself safer on the schooner," I returned. "With thy permission, Mr. Belding, I will remain aboard. I think my sister will cast her lot with mine."

"You shall not have my permission, Mr. Jackson. I feel responsible to the admiral for your safety."

ON THE WRECK

"Then I shall remain without it," I answered abruptly, turning from him and going below.

I was conscious that his eye followed me in displeasure, but the young fellow's returning pluck did something toward strengthening my own, though I had been heartened by a process he little guessed.

To my great astonishment I found Marian at the edge of her bunk trying to stand, but the lurch of the vessel was far too great to permit this, though the yet towering seas seemed to have lost their ability to sicken her. I told her of Belding's determination to desert the schooner, and asked her if I had done right in speaking for her as I had, at the same time pointing out the possible danger of broaching to on the bar (which would mean almost instant destruction), though I explained that the floating wreckage which had held us across the sea for two days might be the means of permitting us to be driven straight over the submerged sands. In this latter event the schooner would be cast ashore hard and fast, and if the wreck did not break up at once our safety would be assured. The danger of returning to New York, even admitting that the trip could be made in safety, was too apparent to be more than mentioned.

The maiden's sudden relief from the terrible nausea of seasickness (than which man knows no more discomfoting malady and which, together with the blow she had received, had completely prostrated her) made her more like her old self, though she was but a pale picture of the woman she had been. I noticed a certain restraint—an indefinable air—about her which made me think that possibly she feared I

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

would take advantage of a certain episode that had occurred during her weakness. The thought came like a bad spirit, disturbing me and robbing me of my ease of manner.

But she did not cavil at my determination to stick to the vessel. Indeed, the idea appealed to her common sense, and with the sweet reserve that had suddenly come upon her she told me I had done right, that the choice lay between two evils. The sands might mean death to us both; the return to the city would surely mean death, with disgrace and suffering for a prelude—for me at least. As for her, she would as soon die as to submit to the degradation and captivity that would ensue, nor could she ever rest under the thought that I had perished through my efforts to save her.

I was relieved to find her of this mind, for had she quailed at the idea of crossing the bar and decided for the boat, I would have gone with her, be the result what it might, though for myself, I preferred to be tossed to my death in the sweet brine rather than swing to it on the end of a rope.

Notwithstanding the peril we were still in and the greater one we were yet to encounter, I was vastly disturbed by her new attitude toward me—an attitude that was remarkable only by being in sharp contrast to that I had looked for. It was not coldness nor yet indifference, but it savored of nothing deeper than friendship and an appreciation of what I had done for her, though she had done as much for me. I knew little of women then, else I might have broken the thin ice that seemed to have formed

ON THE WRECK

between us, and my mind took an unfortunate tack when I considered that the girl had not really known me more than a few days, and that I resembled the man she detested, and who was probably her most virulent enemy. Perhaps, in a moment of weakness, she had submitted to a caress which the leveling power of physical prostration prompted her to return, but now, with her increasing strength, she wished to repudiate the act and keep me at arm's length.

It may appear strange that I should have been sensitive at such a time, but the heart's desire for love, if the heart be worthy, is as strong as its desire for life, and you who know nothing of its disappointment can know nothing of the deep chagrin that overcame me and made my words and actions as cool and matter of fact as the maiden's. I left her, saying that I would not intrude on her privacy again until it became time to act, and took myself to the deck after bidding her lock her door lest Mr. Belding should attempt her removal despite her wish. Her eyes grew large and her look strange, which, like a fool, I took to be due to my words anent her possible forcible removal.

Even in the face of impending death I felt a bitterness that made me reckless for the moment, though this might have passed as bravery. If it did nothing more it kept my head clear to all that happened. I saw the quarter-boat being overhauled preparatory to launching, the men awake and working with a will that betokened hope or fear, either being a mighty stimulus. As I stood by, gloomily watching, it was watered and provisioned, and then

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

the sailors scattered forward. The wind held all the morning, though flawing more and more violently, and the sky, instead of clearing, became curdled with a dapple of clouds through which the sun shone only at intervals. To me the weather looked nasty and the seas had a headlong topple that might well make a man quake at the thought of being among them in a small boat. No bells had been struck for two days, but it was about noon that the attempt was made to abandon the vessel, and by then the outer bar was not a mile away. We were still drifting rapidly, and now the seas had a send to them that helped us along.

When Mr. Belding finally came on deck he was bearing the schooner's chronometer and a tin box, in which I guessed were the belated despatches for Lord Cornwallis. He placed his burden on the cabin house and worked up to where I was standing, holding myself steady and looking at the men as they overhauled the falls of the davits.

"Mr. Jackson, are you ready?" he asked.

"We are not going," I returned.

"It is a poor time for discussion. Your determination is suicidal; you *must* go. I fancy you will not cast yourself from the boat once you are in it. Where is your sister?"

I was within three paces of the mainmast, and stepping to it, I took a belaying-pin from the rack.

"Sir," I said, "I placed myself under orders for a purpose—not for general commands. My sister is locked in her room, and thee had better not burst the door. As for me, thee may try force if thee thinks it advisable, but on the schooner we shall remain, to-

ON THE WRECK

gether with the one who attempts to compel us to leave it."

His young face flushed an instant.

"You are like the rest of your breed," he said with some contempt in his voice, "willing enough to fight when crossed. I have no time to use more than words; your fate must be on your own head. If by God's grace you escape, will you report to the Admiralty and tell them what I have done?"

"By God's grace," I answered tersely, "and I wish thee all luck."

He glanced astern at the milk-white waters, then crossed the deck to the boat, which was immediately lowered. I could not help admiring the grit of the young officer, though I had small respect for his wisdom in trusting himself to the light fabric that ran high and low on the waves which swept under our counter. Save myself, Mr. Belding was the last man to leave the vessel, but hardly had he slid down the stern fall and ordered the boat cast off than I heard a great shout and I caught the word "despatches" through the trumpet of his hands. The boat had at once been swept a dozen fathoms from the schooner, and her four oars flashed as the rowers strained to return.

Both the clock and the box lay where he had forgotten them, and gathering them in my arms I balanced myself to the taffrail prepared to drop them into the boat when it should come close. Slowly the rowers worked their way into the lee of the stern, and I lowered the chronometer into the hands of the man who stood to receive it. As I stooped for the box I heard a warning cry, and the schooner lifted

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

to a heavy sea. As she settled I heard a crunching of wood, and I sprang to my feet in time to mark the boat jam under the counter. Down she went beneath the weight of the descending stern, her gunwale stove to the water's edge. Before I could make a move the boat lay keel up half a dozen fathoms away, swept on by the rush of water that ran past. I saw Mr. Belding and five men clinging to her, the officer's face white with the sudden realization of his certain fate. As I looked two men left the wreck and struck out for the schooner, but the force of the wind and water was greater than their strength. Presently one threw up his hands, gave a cry, and sank, at which the other turned and made his way back to the capsized craft, which was far out of reach of help before I could throw a rope, even had a rope been handy. Like one paralyzed, I watched the boat as it rose and fell on the waves, until, growing smaller and smaller, it finally disappeared in the turmoil the schooner itself was rapidly approaching.

CHAPTER XXIX

CROSSING THE BAR

STUNNED by the awful tragedy, I went below like a man walking in his sleep, the despatch-box, which had been the cause of the disaster, still in my hand. Marian opened the door to my knock, and when I told her we were alone on the vessel and related that which had happened I thought the girl would faint, despite her nerve. I gave her brandy to strengthen her, and taking a draft myself, awaited our own coming trial.

There was but one preparation to make. The idea of using a life-jacket occurred to me, but was at once abandoned, for if the vessel broke and our bodies were launched into the churning brine astern we should be tumbled to death despite any contrivance we might fasten to ourselves. I led the girl to the deck, fearing the cabin might fill with water, and lashed her to the mast. Her white face grew whiter as her eyes for the first time swept over the ocean and she saw the turmoil we were about to enter, but I will swear her lip did not tremble nor her voice break as she said:

“John, it is awful—awful! What are you going to do with yourself?”

“Bind myself to the shrouds,” I answered hoarsely, for I now realized we were nearing the end.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

“O John, do not leave me!” she cried, a quick terror in her voice. “I have brought you to this! Oh, forgive me—forgive me, but do not leave me! Tie yourself by me. If we must die, let it be together; it—it won’t be so—so lonesome. Do you think we can live through it, John?”

“God knows,” I returned in a shout above the roar of the seas. “He is stronger than the waters—if we had the trust.”

“Oh, I have—I have,” she interposed, cutting me short and clasping her hands. “Here by my side, John; tight by my side. O John! your faith has made me brave.”

My faith! As Heaven is my witness, I was well-nigh abject at sight of the hell the edge of which we had already entered, and as I cast the rope about my own waist and tied it firmly to a sail-hoop there was nothing but mortal pride and the presence of the maiden that kept me from breaking down and lamenting. As mechanically as I grasped a halyard with one hand I threw my arm around the girl’s waist, and awaited the shock I knew was imminent. With both hands she clung to me, her face close to mine, her hair, loosened by the wind, flying out in wild disorder.

I can liken the surface of the ocean at this time to nothing but a million of snarling, hooting devils. The roar was deafening. Over all sides at once the water came inboard; not in masses as yet, but like pale-green arms reaching for and falling short of their prey. Though pitched heavily from end to end, we still kept stern on to the maddening force in the midst of which we careened. I held my breath at



“If we must die, let it be together !” she cried.

CROSSING THE BAR

each vindictive bound, fearing the lift would end in a racking crash as in the descent we should strike the crest of the bar.

Not a whimper came from the maiden. Her little mouth was set, and her eyes looked forward at every sea that roared past. The test came finally. I marked a toppling billow sweep down—a huge green mountain—lifting high the mass of floating rubbish that had so far been our salvation, then it came aboard fair on the bow with a crash, and tore toward us, a cataract of milk. It raked the length of the stricken schooner and rose to our knees. As the surge drained from the broken bulwarks and the vessel rose after the mighty shock, the girl lifted her face to mine and smiled faintly. I could not hear her voice, but read her wish.

“Kiss me, John.”

I put my lips to hers and strained her to me, nor did I let her go, for at that moment there came a sidelong lurch, a sickening lift and fall, and the schooner struck with a crash that seemed to split her from end to end. I marked the yaw of the vessel as she broached to sidelong to the sea, and the coming in of the mass of the sea-anchor as a mighty roller bore it down on us. I felt the tip of the deck as we drove on to our beam's ends, the helpless hulk rolling like a log, and then we were under the weight of a deep-green sea—fathoms under, I thought.

God only knows the horror and final abandonment of that moment. My breath seemed about to burst my body. For one instant I was crazed with fear, then felt a peace as profound as Heaven can vouchsafe—a peace that was broken by the light

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

shining in my eyes, the sudden knowledge that I had come back to earth; and since that moment I have never been afraid of death. For a time I must have been unconscious, certainly so much so that I took no thought of my condition, but when I came to myself I found I had fallen to my knees and the maiden lay limp in my arms. The vessel was on an even keel again, fairly afloat, though still rolling heavily; the sea still broke in thunder, but now the billows held no hollow caverns.

About us was a wild waste of tumbling water churned into foam, and the land was not a rifle-shot away. We had crossed the bar, having been washed over by the towering roller that had overwhelmed us, and the deck of the hapless Sprite was scarce a foot above the flood.

Though strained to the limit of my endurance, my eye was quick to see that if the schooner floated ten minutes more she would be cast ashore. I was dumb with suppressed emotion, though my heart sang a song of gratitude to Him who had held us in the hollow of His hand through all that awful time. I struggled to my feet with the unconscious girl, and though I dared not yet loosen our lashings, I did what I could to revive her. She could not have been greatly overcome, probably having suffered more from shock than suffocation, for she soon came to herself, opening her eyes with a shudder and gazing about her as if waked from a dream; finally she looked up at me with a brave attempt at the smile I now knew so well, and I gathered the poor drenched figure to me and kissed her a welcome back to life as I had before kissed her good-by. She

CROSSING THE BAR

spoke no word, neither did she give vent to any emotional extravagance, but clung to me as a woman clings only to her lover; and I knew then that my heart's ease had come at last.

And thus we awaited the final shock—the one I trusted would deliver us. We had entered the formless boil of water that seethed and roared betwixt the bar and the shore. The bulk of the waves was not great, the seas tumbling in short reaches that failed to lift the sodden hulk high or toss it violently. It was plain that the sea-anchor still held us bow to the wind, for our stern pointed landward, and we now approached it with rapidity, each breaker hurling us onward, as if we were in the midst of a mighty rapid.

As a boy I had stood upon the sand of Five Islands and watched, awestruck, the play of the mighty maelstrom after a tempest, but nothing I had ever witnessed equaled the sight of this milky inferno. The snarl of the waters was fearsome, yet above its din I heard the continuous thunder of its impact on the beach. The fog of the spray whirled past on the wind, cutting off details of the land. All was sea and sky and a dim vapor-veiled strip before us.

There was a slight jar when we first struck, such a jar as is felt when one jumps and lands squarely on his heels, but a moment later there came a splitting thump that sickened me. At once the water came over the bows again, but before it reached us we were lifted and hurled forward as if thrown through the air, coming down with a splintering crash that threw me to the deck, the mast to which we were bound swaying like a whip.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

Shocked, but not dismayed, I scrambled to my feet as the deck canted a trifle and the vessel swung nearly broadside to the shore. I marked the sea-anchor drive in over the bows. I saw the eyes of the schooner sink away in the smashing surf as the vessel broke in two forward of the waist, and then another wall of water bore down upon us. Its head dissolved in spray as it struck the wreck, but its body pushed the poop landward, and with another jar we were hard and fast.

Throwing off the line that had held me, I ran to the lifted stern. We were now ashore with the sands on both sides of us and a channel of calm water beyond, for by fortuitous circumstance we had been thrown directly into the shallow inlet that divided the westernmost islet from its fellow eastward, and the wreck almost filled the narrow passage.

If I had been in haste to board the *Sprite* in the beginning, I was now in greater haste to get from her deck. As the surf boiled against the ragged edges of the broken waist, the water, meeting an obstruction, spouted high into the air, and great sections of planking were hurled forward by the blow in a manner that told me that the remains of the wreck would be beaten into driftwood ere many hours passed. Though the shattered fabric now stood high above the sand on either hand, it was an easy matter to get the girl ashore, for the severed main shrouds with their ratlines made a perfect ladder by which to descend.

Never was shipwrecked mariner more thankful than I when I heard the crunch of sand under my feet, and never a one that I have heard of had the

CROSSING THE BAR

fortune to be cast ashore so near his own home and with so little lost—so much gained. Nor yet was it wholly pleasant, for the lurch of the vessel had so got into my brain that, as I tried to walk, I swayed like a drunkard. Even Marian made a better showing than I, but we were both glad enough to sit on a dune and watch our late refuge fly to pieces under the hammer of the rollers; then for relief we looked landward, gazing at the low green shore across the ruffled bay that yet barred us from the mainland and my own home that I could almost see. As I look back at it, I do not wonder at the feeling that began to grow on me ere we had been ashore an hour. My gratitude at our rescue did not abate, but instead of the lift of spirits—the joy of safety that possessed me when first I felt the hard sand beneath my feet and reeled along the shore, that seemed to wave up and down in sympathy with the motion I had known so long—instead of exuberance came a dead weight of depression, a slowly growing and overbearing consciousness of the flatness of life, and that, too, while at my side sat the woman for whom I had risked all and who looked out toward the land or turned her eyes to mine with a sweet wistfulness that was strange in her face.

I was perfectly aware that this depression was but reaction from my long nervous strain, and I strove to fight it off with the truth, but it lay like a heavy hand on me—on us both, I think. We must have sat quiet and without a word between us until I suddenly became aware that the day was closing and that there was no way of leaving the island, that no shelter had been provided, and that for a time

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

we were as completely marooned as if cast on a key of the Tortugas. I might have made a shift and kindled a fire that would undoubtedly have attracted attention, but in all likelihood the attention would not have been welcome; but something must be done for the girl.

The sun broke clear from the west just before it dipped below the horizon and turned the world to gold. It burnished the stranded poop, or that portion remaining intact, its yellow eye lighting up the stern lights of the captain's cabin with a flash that shot from the unshattered glass as if a lamp were burning within. The gleam of the reflected light put an idea in my head, and as the wind had died and the sea was rapidly subsiding, I proposed that Marian should go aboard and make herself comfortable for the night in the cabin. But the girl recoiled with horror at the thought (albeit it was a sensible one), and it was all I could do to get her to consent to my return to procure some things absolutely necessary to a woman's comfort. Prevailing at last, I clambered along the now prostrate mast and reentered the wreck. The poop bulkhead was still intact and had saved the interior of the cabin from being entirely demolished, though it had not kept out the water. The flood that had entered when we struck the bar had drained away, but all was in confusion worse confounded. The only remaining portion of the hulk that was not ruined was the after-cabin once occupied by Lakely, and I hurried through it with an eye to a hammock, but could not find one. The rest of the wreck reeked with brine, and its damp gloom was suggestive of ghosts. In the way

CROSSING THE BAR

of food I could find nothing save a large tin of fine biscuits and some bottled wine, which, for a wonder, lay unbroken in the rack, and wrapping these in a thin bunk mattress and the whole in what dry bed-clothing I could lay my hands on, I tumbled them over the side on to the sand. Then I cut a huge piece of canvas from the mainsail and got together a mass of rope, which I also flung over, and was about to follow when I thought of the despatch-box. The growing dark made the place uncanny, and the washing of water below sent up a sound like the sobbing of distressed spirits. Like a frightened boy I poked over the rubbish and finally found the box in a corner, jammed and battered, together with an unbroken spy-glass. Both glass and box were full of water, but they were salvage that might prove of value, and with them I hastened to join Marian, who welcomed me back with relief in her eyes, although I had been in no danger.

In an hour I had made a shelter for her by throwing the canvas over a stunted tree and laying the mattress on the long sparse grass that grew from the interior sand. Our clothing was dry by this, and as the night was calm and warm there was little to be feared from lack of comfort even in this rough camp.

I can not say what thoughts possessed me as Marian and I watched the stars come out. The seas, now reduced to heavy swells, leaped from the gloom like ghosts and charged toward us only to be shattered into hissing suds that swayed, a long white ribbon, along the dark shore. Though my thoughts were linked to the girl at my side, they did not evapo-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

rate in soft nothings. Body and soul I was too a-weary to look beyond stern necessity and the hurdles of difficulty I had yet to leap. The future was a blank with but one bright spot in it—Marian—and she it was that bid fair to cause me endless anxiety. She was but barely recovered from her distressing illness and the effects of the blow occasioned by her fall. I saw no haven of rest for her, and in my present mental state lip service and endearments were of no more weight, in my opinion, than the froth of the surf. But little I knew of a woman's heart at that time. Not since we had set foot on the land, not since I had kissed her when she returned to life, had we mentioned the one subject that to me seemed too sacred to be voiced even in the wide privacy surrounding us. Circumstances had forced me to be practical, and even now my thoughts ran in an unromantic line, albeit we were perched on the very pinnacle of romance. The girl sat with her hand in mine (where she had placed it) and refused to leave me to retire to her tent, until at last my numbed brain balked and my head drooped to my chest from sheer exhaustion. Then, as if she had been grappling with a mighty problem, she stood up and faced me.

"John," she said sweetly, but with none of the spirit that had once marked her—"John, had it not been for you I should have fallen a victim to your cousin. Had it not been for you I should have suffered all I have feared. I know my debt to you as well as I know what you have done—as I know how you have pitied me in my distress. But I do not wish your pity, my dear friend, and I think—I am"

CROSSING THE BAR

afraid—we misunderstood each other. At least you have—you have——”

She stopped and my heart contracted with a fear that made my wandering faculties wide-awake. I could not speak, but stared at her in dumb astonishment and waited for the blow.

“I must say it now, my friend—for that I know you are. I must be honest, at least. I was unmaidenly, John, but you made me presumptuous—for I thought—I thought—O John, John! Can’t you see? Did you not know what would happen?”

Here she broke down, and burying her face in her hands, sobbed bitterly.

To me she was far more lucid than appears in this, and her tears were more eloquent than all else. Satisfied of the security of her affection, I had let her go heart-hungry. Aye, more. I had never spoken the word, I had never asked the question a woman longs for. I might have been the veriest libertine for all the return I had made for her great gift; but I had thought she read me as I read myself. Now that I was on the brink of losing her I saw my mistake—the selfishness of my own heart’s content and her effort to preserve her pride and find the ground on which she was to stand. I was fairly weak from the shock of her first words, but her last—her despairing bid for a return for the love she had so freely given—showed me my shortcoming. I leaped to my feet and drew her to me, pouring out all I had felt, but left unspoken. I wooed her then, as many a man has wooed a woman, but none have been more sincere, I swear; none more tender. And I marveled at the rich return—at my wondrous for-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

tune. Here was no lip-bound maiden, abashed and silent in the new world she had entered, content to listen dumbly or quiver shrinkingly in her lover's embrace. The heart's vocabulary is great, but none could be greater than hers. The star outshone the meteor. Until then I had never known her; even then, in the richness of first affection, in the flood that burst over me, I guessed of but a tithe of the glory that came later. What is night to day? What is the moon to the sun? The same as lust to love—as vice to virtue. Yes, even the same as that great day was to days that have followed, for the sun of her love still warms me—as it warmed me into a life I had never known until that hour when together we crossed the last bar.

CHAPTER XXX

THE DEVIL IS SICK

For three days did we remain marooned on the island—three days of perfect existence save for the knowledge that this condition of things could not endure. Of water we had sufficient, for I had found an unbroken butt that had washed ashore from the wreck, a fortunate discovery, else the aspect might have appeared tragic. Of crackers and wine we had a sufficiency, but crackers and wine, even when flavored with love, is not a diet on which one expands, although it met our absolute needs for the time. I longed to get upon the mainland, but even while I longed I dreaded the hour that would enable us to depart from the sanctified sand sprit. For we were not prisoners from choice. We had been unmolested by beach-combers, and the authorities evidently had no hint of what had happened or what a rich prize lay well within their grasp.

By the end of the second day I had built a frail fabric from the *débris* that now strewed the beach, and towing the raft through the channel, anchored it on the bay side of the island. All we needed was a fair wind to blow us across the stretch of water, and it was for this we waited, but the wind seemed set from north or west, and held us inactive, though

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

it made a page in my life that can never be forgotten. As grew my love for Marian, so grew my love for my fellows, until hate was a word of little use, and had this existence been prolonged, the word hate would have become meaningless.

Whatever dread of the future I might have had, there seemed to be no fear in this former light of society and fashion. She had unbounded faith in the goodness of the Power that had guided us hither, and one might have thought we were but picnicking on the edge of a summer sea. Her laugh was as light and musical as the whistle of the sandpipers that ran along the beach before her. Her spirits had come back with a rush after the first night's rest, and they were little less than unbounded, for the novelty of her situation appealed to her well-nigh as much as our providential escape from the rapacity of the ocean. It was only in the evening that she would become serious; when the darkness made the sea weird and the earth big and desolate, and once when we had strolled along the sands far from our camp.

There we found the wreck of the quarter-boat, cast high and dry. The sight of it broke the spell of her gaiety, and on going farther I stopped her, for ahead lay a black object I feared to let her see. The glass I carried revealed a prostrate man, and to be sure that life was extinct I went forward alone. God forbid that I should ever see so horrid a thing again! It was the seaman who had stood with me at the wheel. He lay flat on his back, his arms stretched wide, forming a somber cross on the hard white sand, the lapping surf barely licking his swollen feet. I tiptoed away as if in fear of waking him, leav-

THE DEVIL IS SICK

ing him to be taken back to his grave by the kind and cleanly hand of the rising tide. No other trace of the ill-fated crew did we discover, but it was hours before Marian would let me leave her or ere she smiled. From that moment I think she wished to have done with marooning and spoke of the future, whereas she had dwelt mostly on the past and the present.

It was long before we hit upon a definite course, nor could we get further than to see the necessity of approaching my late home. To get Prince to help us on our way had become imperative, but not alone to find the slave had we determined to take the risk, but to obtain the gold yet buried in the mud, and without which I should make but a lame showing. If the money had been worth the hazard we had taken, it was still worth rescuing, for I was by no means certain that the squire could recover it. Its delivery to the authorities would constitute my one claim on the Government, and this foothold I determined to strive for still. Failing, I should be reduced to beggary at a time when poverty would be more than mortification and short commons. Here was a woman, rich in her own right, herself proscribed, and her property undoubtedly confiscated. Conditions made it impossible to communicate with her relatives in the South (and they were but distant relatives, at best), and for the time she was as much under my protection as if we were man and wife.

Therefore money was necessary, and beyond the reward promised for my services I knew not of a dollar I could rightfully claim, and my uncle was in no position to assist me.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

On the morning of our third day on the island the wind was still from the north, but I arose from my sand bed under an oak hard by the tent with a feeling that it was to be the last of our marooning. The breeze piped merrily all day until about three in the afternoon, then it backed to the west, its song growing fainter, until about sunset, when it fell to a whisper from the south, and at last blew gently from the southeast, though bringing with it a hint of rain in the low blue clouds that streaked the horizon and gradually climbed to the zenith. It suited my purpose to be blown in the dark across the six or seven miles of water that separated us from the mainland, for the nondescript craft with its makeshift square-sail would have created too much curiosity had we passed over the bay by daylight.

The spirits of the maiden suffered an eclipse when we finally embarked, absolutely empty-handed save for the telescope and a bottle of wine. The box had been broken open, but it contained nothing but military reports and a few papers that I put in my pocket, not knowing their worth. The girl turned her face wistfully toward the camp we had left, and though our shelter had been but a sorry affair, I shared something of her depression as I saw the first blue water between us and the place where love had been enough; where danger had left us with but life and happiness for companions. Were these last to be but temporary? Who could tell? The past and the present may shout, but the future is ever silent.

Fortunately, though by no direction from us, our course lay northwest, and by the time the voyage

THE DEVIL IS SICK

was completed the gray of another dawn was upon us. We grounded on the marshy point known as Sampawams and waded ashore, two beings, chilled, hungry, and homeless, but not hopeless. The venture had been successful, though our destination yet lay some eight miles away.

We rested in the woods that morning, our only sustenance being the wine and an abundance of blueberries, and the storm, which proved to be nothing but wind, was short-lived, the sun coming out by noon, putting spirit into us as only the sun can do, while youth and health did the rest.

We struck the path called the road, but the country was so deserted at that period, so crushed by war, so lacking in activity, that we met not a soul on the highway, though we kept a sharp lookout. Marian walked somewhat heavily at my side, and I think her laugh was a trifle forced at times. A quaint figure she made in her close-fitting, brine-stained Quaker dress with its starched linen gone long since, hatless, her face browned by exposure. What a metamorphosis necessity had made in her! Yet suffering had not altered her attractiveness; nay, nor has it ever, neither have years marred her beauty in my eyes. Is the perfected fruit less lovely than the blossom?

As for me, betwixt the water, the sun, and hard usage, I was well-nigh in rags. My leather breeches were cracked, as were my shoes. I was also hatless, my coat was a disgrace, my only shirt in ribbons. But we were young, and each was content with the other. Ah, God! that the years might turn back and give me that buoyancy of body and mind, that glory of life, which in youth seems a matter of course,

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

which man misses only when his sun is nigh its setting!

It was almost exactly four and twenty hours from the time I pushed from Five Islands when I sighted my uncle's house. We approached it cautiously, and not until dusk had well settled on the land. Hungry I was, and beset by a pang worse than hunger when I saw the place that had always been home to me, but which I might never call so again. Wrecked, ragged, and outcast, I was sneaking near a haven in which it had once been my right to rule, and even the heavens seemed in sympathy with the situation. For with the fall of the wind the distressing heat had come again and the sky was banked with clouds through which, anon, silent sheets of heat lightning swayed tremulously. For some time I had been conscious of a tightening of my nerves—no new sensation; nor did it lessen when I saw that while the lower portion of the house was dark, there was a bright light shining from the window of my aunt's old room. I had no wish to see her, neither had I a fear of her, and when fully satisfied that the premises were unguarded by soldiers, I took the maiden by the hand and went boldly forward. To my astonishment the negro quarters were dark and apparently deserted, so I turned to the house as a last resort, leaving the girl in the slave cabin until I should return.

Contrary to custom when I was at home, there was no light in the lower hall, but there was enough that shot from the clouds to give me a shock as I stepped on the piazza; for on either door-post was painted the black "broad arrow" of the king, which

THE DEVIL IS SICK

told me how rapidly had turned the wheels of confiscation. The last cord had been cut.

Within there was no evidence of military occupation, however, so I made my way through the dark passage and up the stairs. How little I dreamed that the drama in which I had been an important actor was about to close! But that another crisis had arisen was perfectly apparent when I knocked at my aunt's door and heard a man's voice feebly bid me come in. This was immediately supplemented by my aunt's thin treble, and I entered the room to find myself confronting my old enemy, James Colt.

Had I known him at once I might have staggered back in confusion, and even fled, so great was my consternation, so unprepared was I to meet him, so totally unguessed was his presence; but there was little to fear in the man before me, for a more bloodless and broken specimen of humanity I had never seen. He sat in a low-seated, high-back chair, writing on his lap. He was dressed in a brilliant bedgown, and despite the hot and humid atmosphere a blanket lay across his drawn-up knees, while from under it were displayed his feet encased in slippers that matched the glory of his gown. That he was or had been a very sick man was as apparent from the livid paleness of his face and the clawlike aspect of his thin hands, which were immediately and involuntarily clenched as he saw me, as it was from the blanket and the table with its glasses, spoons, and medicine vials that stood by his side. His hair was neatly dressed, and his black eyes showed that though his body had waned, all his old spirit had not yet burned away. Beyond the scowl that con-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

tracted his eyebrows when he saw me and a quick, spasmodic indrawing of breath, as if breathing were difficult, he made at first no move either to welcome or to denounce me. My aunt it was that broke the spell, for she rose to her feet with an exclamation that showed how thoroughly she had been surprised, though, lacking the force to take the initiative in the presence of her son, she only looked from me to him in utter astonishment, or as if she were comparing my ragged and disheveled condition to the gorgeous equipment of my cousin.

"Madam," I said, turning to her.

"Good Lord! Be ye back again?" she ejaculated. "What do you want now? Go away or I'll——"

"Mother, you're a fool!" said Colt feebly, the effort making him bring his hand to his chest, and after this exposition of filial respect he addressed me, his voice trembling from weakness, his meekness in strong contrast to the spirit of the elderly lady.

"You are a man of rare nerve, John Chester." He spoke with an effort, taking frequent breaths and crumpling up the paper on which he had been writing. "And so you have run the gantlet! You look it. Why are you here?"

"Why should I not be here?" I asked, for lack of a better return. "Let me rather ask why you are here?"

"I had no intention of being aggressive," he returned without spite, though his eye belied his gentleness. "I think we can ery quits. I have played my last card and lost. Have you come to have your

THE DEVIL IS SICK

revenge? I am but poor material for a brave man to work upon."

"You know as well as I that to kill is not my mission. I might have done that long since."

"To gloat over my condition, then?"

I opened my mouth to speak, but he raised his thin hand in protest and continued:

"For all the advantage I have had, you have won. I acknowledge it, John. I am at your mercy at last; unarmed, unguarded, and alone. Even were I armed I am too weak to act. Sickness—it is my old heart-trouble—has brought me so low that I am open to a new conviction. I see the sin of desire. A pity it is that I had to learn my lesson at so great a cost. I am glad you have come. Where did you go when—when I was stricken?"

"It is of small consequence, inasmuch as I am here at present," I answered. "I have no time to waste on you. Where is Prince?"

He looked at me a moment, his face without the faintest trace of rancor.

"You have time, and to spare," he answered, in a manner so unusual that I hardly knew him. "Your reason will tell you that nowhere can you be as safe as here. I have a word to say to you. I do not think you understand me, John Chester. I am a doomed man. Do I not show it? I would have my conscience less torn. I have wronged you vilely. What amends can I make?"

"Where is my uncle?" I asked abruptly.

He looked at me so strangely that I thought he was about to faint, and again my aunt spoke up:

"For shame, ye interloper! How have ye the

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

heart to open a raw wound in this fashion? James can not speak of him. Betwixt his grief and your cowardice he has been made sick."

And with this she hastened to the side of the drooping man.

I had gained something once before from the childlike simplicity of this tactless old woman, and as plainly as if I had been informed in as many words I became aware that my uncle was still dead to both my cousin and his mother, and furthermore, that the sick man had made up some cock-and-bull story regarding an encounter with me and the cause of the shock that had overtaken his weak heart. For all that I was in tatters and well-nigh famished, I now felt that I was master of the situation, and had it not been for my desire to learn of Prince I should have left the precious couple at once and gone to foraging below. But for Prince I feared, thinking that perhaps he had paid heavily for his devotion, and I approached the matter guardedly, though determined that they should suffer had evil befallen the negro.

"The subject of the squire is very naturally a disagreeable one," I rejoined, "and I will willingly turn from it for a moment. To whom do you owe your liberation? Taken altogether, it was a fortunate circumstance for me, but I have some curiosity."

Colt waved away the glass his mother offered him and straightened himself, while something that might have been a spasm of pain passed over his blue lips.

"To the fact that you did not tie me tighter," he answered. "I would to God the knot had held!"

THE DEVIL IS SICK

I have met with nothing but disaster since I liberated myself."

"Whom have you to thank for that? Where is Prince?"

The remaining light seemed to die from the man's eyes as he answered:

"Prince is—is away." And here he stopped.

"Is he dead?" I vociferated, striding up to the man, for my wrath became boundless.

Instead of quailing he simply held up his hands, as did my aunt, the lady supplementing her act with a shriek.

"No, no; upon my honor, no! He and Nancy are at Tryon Hall. I—I sold them, but the nigger still looks after the place. Kill me outright, if you will, but do not startle me so. I am a fallen man. I have admitted you owe me no good-will, but you must believe this. Do as you wish with me, but for God's sake, be gentle—gentle!"

"And by what right did you sell the slaves?" I demanded, speaking more quietly, for his distress seemed genuine.

"I had reason, if not excuse. I was forced to it, being in poverty. I thought the title rested in me. You were proscribed, my—the squire had—was dead——"

"The squire is not dead," I interrupted. "It was no ghost you saw. I deceived you to save him from you. I deceived all at first; then you deceived yourself. But it served my purpose."

This information was received much as I expected it would be. My aunt did not believe it, but the shrewder mind of the man of the world was quick to

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

catch the sequence of past events. Colt looked at me blankly and turned as weak as water, sinking back in his chair as if his back-bone had given out. His mother cast a withering glance at me and sprang to his assistance, offering him the glass he had once refused, but which he now took willingly enough. Presently he revived, and finally faltered:

“I—I thank God for that blow, but I gave you little credit for such depth. I will make amends—amends—when I recover—when I get stronger. Be easy—be easy. I am but hanging on life.”

His extreme prostration showed in both looks and voice, and the truth of his last words was apparent. But however harmless he had become, however much he desired to undo the wrong he had committed, the power to make restitution had passed beyond him. I thought, then, that perhaps his repentance was sincere, and that his inability to right a wrong was causing him much suffering, but I did not deceive myself for long. As he finished speaking my aunt started to leave the room, but I quickly interposed myself betwixt her and the door.

“You can not go out, madam,” I said sharply.

“I can’t go out! What will ye do next, ye heartless boy? I was but going to the kitchen for something,” she answered spitefully, though I plainly saw the look of chagrin on her seamed face.

“You may go later for your son; as for me, I can attend to my own wants. I wish you both to understand that you are dealing with a desperate man. I will give no room for treachery. Stay here until I come back.”

Nothing could be gained by further crossing

THE DEVIL IS SICK

words with them, and I was in no humor for violence. At present my physical demands were pressing, and, moreover, I knew the girl would be anxiously waiting my return to her. Picking up the light, with scant ceremony I went below, leaving the two in the dark, and had there been a key in the lock of the door I would have turned it on them. Fortunately there was not, else I should have overleaped myself. Descending to the kitchen, I gathered what food there was handy and placed it in the entrance hall; then running to the cabin, brought Marian back. This done, I took the lamp back to the sick man and returned to the entrance, and there, in the intense gloom, we partook of proper nourishment for the first time in days. We ate heartily and without interruption, for no one attempted to enter, and I was prepared to see that no one left the house.

The meal being finished, it became necessary to work rapidly. Obtaining a candle, I lighted it by the lamp, and without replying to my aunt's question as to what I wished, went to my own room. It took but a glance to see that it had been occupied by my cousin, and without a great deal of apology to my conscience I appropriated enough of his belongings to enable me to present a decent appearance. His sword and a pistol lay on the table, and fearing that, despite his protestations, he would not hesitate to use the latter on me, and wondering why he had not sent his mother for it, I looked on it in the light of treasure trove, and took it. My appearance in my new costume frightened Marian, who almost cried out, and placing her in the parlor, from where she could command a view of the stairs and hall, I

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

set the light on the table, and giving her the pistol, bade her prevent any one from going out, though by this I was well assured that the house contained no one but ourselves, Colt, and his mother, and was satisfied that the girl would carry out instructions to the letter.

Then I left and started to complete my work. As I strongly suspected, there was a horse in the barn, and the military bridle hanging on a peg told me whose it was without the asking. How I was to transfer the heavy bulk of the gold, in case no means of transportation was at hand, had been a question that had worried me ever since I discovered the absence of Prince, but that problem being solved, it was with the feeling that the last fence had been climbed that I hastened to draw the money from its muddy bed.

It was there safe and sound, every bag of it, but its weight had so sunk it that it was over an hour before I had it dug and washed. I carried it back to the house and had Marian's cheerful report that no one had passed the stairs or entrance, though she had heard footsteps in the hall above. Placing the gold and the remnants of food in the saddle-bag I had taken from the barn, I hastened back to equip the horse and be off. By this time the lightning had increased in frequency and intensity, but not a sound of thunder accompanied the fitful gleams. As I approached the barn again I marked that the stable-door was open, whereas I well remembered closing it on coming out, and on reentering, saw with consternation that the horse was no longer there.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE WAGE OF SIN

I CAN not express the shock of this discovery. Had I been dreaming or was I dreaming now? I was so demoralized that like a fool I actually searched the barren building as if the brute had hidden in an empty corn-bin or had flown up among the black rafters. I even swung the great doors that I might better scan the interior. The lightning enabled me to see at once that every stall was empty, as was the peg on which the animal's bridle had been hanging. I came to myself sufficiently then to mark that though the bridle had gone, the saddle had not, but the saddle-cloth, with the royal arms on its corners, and which had hung with the saddle itself, was missing. For a moment I tried to comfort myself with the hope that Prince had returned, and, unaware of my presence, had sent the horse out to grass that the scant store of hay might last the longer. But this failed to account for the missing bridle and saddle-cloth, and fairly at my wit's ends as to what my next move should be, I went back to the house.

I expected that Marian would be dumfounded at the news, but though surprised she did not become panic-stricken.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

"Is this the only door that leads outside?" she asked.

"No; but there is no communication to the other from above save through this hall, and you say no one has passed."

"Not a soul. Was no one below?"

"No."

"No? Then, while the loss of the horse is unfortunate, it does not mean danger to us. No one save those up-stairs knows we are here. Let us rest easy—we must rest anyhow for a while, and at early dawn start after the negro. He can help us. In the meantime we will guard the stairs by turns."

It was a simple expedient, but I could see nothing else to do, though to make sure of matters above I went up again and entered my aunt's room to find Colt alone and leaning back like one in the last stages of decline. An open Bible lay on his lap, where but a short time before he had been writing, and had he suddenly presented a loaded pistol at me I do not think it would have awakened me as did the sight of the sacred book on his knees. It was so foreign to his nature, it was such a palpable piece of acting, that I could hardly contain myself from laughing at his simplicity.

"Where is your mother?" I demanded.

"She has but stepped to my chamber—or rather, yours. She will return in a moment. I wish to speak a word with you before you go. Will you sit down?"

"Say what you have to say, and hurry," I replied, looking keenly at him, as I remained standing, my hand on the latch.

"It is strange," he began, "that one does not see

THE WAGE OF SIN

the faults of his life until life is near its ending; and the fruit is bitter. I have learned much since I saw you in your own room, perhaps you taught me something, but this—this has taught me more.” He laid his lean hand over the open book. “All I can do now, John—forgive me for calling you John—is to make the small amends I can. I can not give you back the rights that were yours, for they have passed from me, if they were ever mine, but I can and will assist you to escape. You are not alone, I am aware, for I have heard another with you. Is it any one I know?”

“Yes.”

“You mean——”

“I mean Annie Kronje. I mean Marian.”

He smiled faintly.

“You are very familiar.”

“I have the right,” I answered concisely.

He understood me well enough. He tried to appear unconcerned, but the attempt was a failure. His face did not change, but he seemed to have forgotten that he had hands, and that hands were expressive. The one that lay on the book clenched suddenly, crumpling the page on which it rested. He smoothed out the wrinkled paper and continued:

“You might rest in safety here to-night. I have a horse in the stable which you may take and go where you will. But this is not all. Sit down, I can not speak so loud, and do not wish your aunt to hear me. It is about the property.”

I made my face appear as unsuspicious as possible as I answered:

“I am glad you have a change of heart. Excuse

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

me but a moment. I will come back and hear you out."

I now felt sure that there was some deviltry afoot, and the absence of my aunt coupled with the sudden disappearance of the horse seemed a part of it, though how the two could be connected, the hall having been guarded, was more than I then saw. I saw a moment later, however.

I hurried to my room. It was empty. The squire's own sleeping apartment was also empty, as was the guest-chamber, but in the linen-room off the hall I found a window open, and on looking out marked how completely we had been flanked, for all our care, and by an old woman. Beneath the window the back-door shed projected some eight feet below, and from the sill where I stood to its roof hung a twisted sheet, one end knotted and held above by being jammed into the shut drawer of a great linen press that stood hard by. From the roof below to the ground descent was easy, for a heavy trellis, vine covered, made a ladder down which a child might have gone with safety. My aunt was well-nigh seventy years old, but age had not handicapped her litheness. At all events, she had done what not one woman in twenty would have dared attempt, and she had undoubtedly gone to summon the soldiers; gone probably over an hour before or as soon as I had left the room; sneaked to the stable and ridden away, practically on a barebacked horse.

The end of the matter seemed very near as I stared in blank astonishment from the window, and, indeed, the end was at hand. I was keen enough then. I heard the low rumble of distant thunder

THE WAGE OF SIN

and marked the strong effect of the summer lightning as the landscape opened and closed under its flashing. My ear was tuned for every sound, and ere I had recovered from the surprise of my discovery I had heard enough to set my heart thumping. It was the hurried tramp of a horse being urged at speed—only one—and the rattle of a chaise. It was on the main road when I first heard it, but it seemed to be in the garden before I was sure of it, and in a moment more it had swung past me and stopped at the door. I could not see who was in the vehicle, but I heard a man's voice, two men, and then I became desperate. My only chance was to hold my prisoner as hostage, for it was too late to save the girl below by either flight or force. Running back to my own room, I seized Colt's sword and made for him. As I felt my way along the hall I heard quick voices below, and had barely crossed the threshold of the sick man's room when hurried steps came up the stairs, my name was called, and I turned to find myself facing my uncle. Behind him came Josephine Cowan.

There were no greetings on my part, only an exclamation of wonder and a sense of relief that almost made me faint. I do not know who was most astounded at the sight of the squire, Colt or myself, but my uncle did not appear in the least surprised, as why should he, knowing he was to see me? He took my hand and pressed it without a word as he looked over my shoulder and at the man in the chair.

My cousin laughed then—a thin, mirthless chuckle—though the sight of the old gentleman had

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

brought him half on his feet. As he sank back, two red spots now burning on his cheek, he said:

“And there ye are at last, are ye? And good flesh and blood! What hell’s game have ye been playing?”

The squire dropped my hand and stepped forward. The lady remained standing in the doorway.

“Saving to your guilty conscience, I have always been flesh and blood,” returned the squire. “Let us settle matters finally. You have paid heavily.”

“Damned heavily,” interrupted Colt, “and you’ll soon balance the beam.—Josephine, you saw my mother—she arrived safe?”

“Yes,” was the simple answer, though given with a heightened color.

“Then let’s cut this cursed farce. The day has gone for you two,” he snarled, pointing at the squire and myself. “I made a cast for one, and have caught three. God, what chances fall to patience! Call them up, Josephine, and let not the girl below get away.”

“Call whom, James?” asked the woman very quietly.

“The guard, ye fool! Call the guard ye brought.”

“There is no guard, James; not even at the house. I dismissed them three days since, when the squire came.”

“Hell and furies!” exclaimed Colt, leaning forward. “When the squire came! Do you dare tell me——”

“I dare tell you more, James,” interposed the girl, meeting my eyes and advancing a step toward

THE WAGE OF SIN

me. Her full, rich voice was very gentle. "I told it to John once when you lay tied in his room. James, I helped John to escape. Have you not read me since your return? Have you not seen your lack of influence? I am not the woman I was. I have repented; it is never too late. Listen, my poor unfortunate friend, I pity you in your distress, but I must speak the truth. A woman may defend herself by deceit until she is safe to throw aside the mask. I no longer fear you as I once did, and now I will show you my real face; to others I have shown it before. Hate is not an abiding thing, James; nay, and my hate has been turned to love—to love, and perforce. I must be very plain now. I love your cousin John. I have saved him twice; I will save him again, for, James Colt, I am his promised wife."

As she spoke the last word she drew herself up proudly, and stepping to me laid her hand on my arm and kissed me on the lips. I stood like a stone. My uncle swung about in utter consternation, but there was no time for further confidences, and the situation could not be considered even awkward, for there was no pause. Ere I could make a move either to return the caress or to deny the girl's assertion, the center of interest shifted to Colt, who was fairly foaming at the mouth. He leaped to his feet, the blanket falling from his knees, his face working strangely as he fruitlessly essayed to speak, his eyes blazing with impotent rage. Like a galvanized corpse, he stood swaying and pointing at the girl, his index-finger shaking as if palsied; then with a choking exclamation he burst out:

"Oh, ye damned—ye doubly damned and perfidi-

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

ous woman! May God—may God strangle ye—strangle ye—ye——”

The unfinished curse constituted his last words. I believe he died as he stood there, for without even lowering his arm or bending his knees he pitched slowly forward, as does a tree at the beginning of its fall, and struck the floor on his face, rebounding from the shock, the whole house jarred by the impact of his body.

Thrusting Josephine from me, I ran to him and turned him over. His eyes were still open, but the light and rage had gone from them together. It was the fulfilling of the law. He had reaped as he had sown.

Sudden and unexpected as this had been, I was neither awed nor upset by the tragedy. I had been through too much to be greatly impressed by any dramatic situation. My callowness had gone. But I was far from feeling absolute relief, albeit the factor of personal danger had been removed, and if I turned my attention to my cousin's body it was only because I dared not face the girl who had followed me, and who now stood looking down on her late lover with horror in her eyes.

Heaven knows I feel no conceit when I state that I was aware that I must deal a blow to this woman which would appear more foul than the one she had dealt Colt. I knew the intensity of her nature, I knew my own power over her, but I would rather have met danger in the shape of Colt's active enmity than to give her reason now to misunderstand my present position for a moment longer, to deceive her further by either word or inference.

THE WAGE OF SIN

My uncle, wonderfully moved by the sudden death of his would-be murderer, had sunk into a chair. I was feeling for the heart of the dead man, and Josephine, with wonderful nerve, I thought, was bending over him, her hand on my shoulder, when I heard an exclamation from the squire, and looking up beheld Marian, white and anxious, standing in the doorway with the cocked pistol in her hand. I had no doubt that the commotion had impressed the girl with the idea that I was in danger, and she had come to help me, but be that as it may, there she stood, at a glance evidently comprehending the situation. Disguised as she was, her identity was not concealed from Josephine, for that lady straightened herself and appeared more moved than she had been at the fall of Colt.

“Marian! Marian Romaine!”

Without noticing the speaker, Marian turned to me.

“What has happened, John?”

“What has happened?” interposed Josephine before I could answer. “See what has happened! Your lover is dead. Mourn for him freely; you will not now make me jealous. Think not that you have ever deceived me, you poor child! I gave him to you long since. What a disguise for an assignation! Did his mother know?”

She spoke without anger, but there was a bitterness in her words that told me a story I had partly guessed before. I saw the blood fly to the face of my love and her bosom swell, but without giving her a chance to speak I sprang to her side.

“This is no place for you, Marian. Colt has

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

paid his debts. Go below, and I will join you presently. Danger has passed, but I have yet something to do."

With a stare at Josephine that bore more of malignancy than I dreamed her capable of, but without a word to me, Marian turned and left the room, and the squire rose and followed her.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE SWAN SONG

THEN I turned to the waiting woman, who had fixed her eyes on me in a way I can not express. As the apartment was cleared her face changed and became suddenly lighted by a smile of exquisite tenderness as she held out her arms toward me and took a step forward. My heart contracted as I dealt my first blow, for as her passion found utterance in her first words, "At last! at last!" I lifted my hand and stepped across the prostrate body, thus putting it between us. She stopped short, her arms falling, her smile and color fading together.

"John, John! What do you mean? Have you not come back to me? Will love profane the dead?"

My voice was hoarse as I answered:

"Aye, Josephine; I have come back, but how I can not say to you. Listen to me. I did not expect this scene. I looked to find no one here save my aunt, who has finally done me a favor while intending to do me a wrong; least of all I looked to see you. Providentially, I have escaped capture, I have escaped from shipwreck, and there remains but one thing more to overcome."

I stopped a moment to draw my breath, for deep within I was terribly excited. The girl's face had turned chalky, but she stood like a statue, her black

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

eyes looking into mine without a tremor. More in wonder than in anger, I continued:

“Josephine, but a moment ago you told the man that lies here that defense by deceit was justifiable. It is; the world proves the truth of it. And acting on this belief, I have used deceit when necessary, and God knows the necessity has been well-nigh continual. I came home a boy and quickly found myself a prisoner. You freed me, but nevertheless I was not indebted to you, nor am I now save that my experience with you has made me a man. I knew why you set me free. I was aware of your intention to trap me, and that, too, at the instance of the man who has paid for his crimes. I knew him, also. Miss Cowan, when I placed that letter in your hands I was aware it was a cipher, and, moreover, I had a knowledge of every word it contained. I can repeat them now. Yet I believed the note would save me for the time, and it did. Before I came I had a mission—a mission to communicate to one Annie Kronje, of whose identity I did not dream. This mission divulged to you would have hanged me, and for that reason you wished it. After you freed me I had another object—to deceive you. Frankly, I did not know of your repentance—not until you confessed your love for me, taking me for my cousin. Could I have done otherwise than I did? Could I have voiced my detestation while you had a guard at your back? Not until that moment did I know I had been successful in my acting. You and this man had plotted for my life and the life of my uncle. Was this a knowledge to feed affection? In turn, I plotted, as I had the right. If you——”

THE SWAN SONG

"Oh, for God's sake, stop—stop!" she gasped, but she did not move or raise her hand. Her eyes had grown larger and gazed straight ahead, not now at me, but as if she were looking at a vision.

"I thought you would never know," she said almost in a whisper, but vacantly. "I told you of—I told you to stop the medicine, and I knew—I knew that Squire Emberson was not dead. I knew——"

"You *knew*!" I thundered.

She nodded slowly, as a child nods confession to a fault.

"How?"

"Oh, well, it was Nancy. I let the deceit go on to save him from—from—" She pointed at the corpse. "How—how could I tell you?" she continued wearily. "I had learned to love you. I thought you loved me and was afraid to speak. You caught me on the rebound from this poor fool. I could not have you hate me. O John, John!" she suddenly broke forth, stretching out her arms in the old appealing way. "For the love of Christ, who was all love—whom I have outraged—forgive me! forgive me! It was you who reclaimed me. Would you undo your work? Yes—yes, you were justified in all; God guarded you even as in the end he guided me. And, John, I love you so! Oh, for the glory of Heaven, do not tell me you hate me—that your words were *all* lies! See, see, you belie yourself! You pity me. O John, you are weeping!"

Down on her knees she dropped, dry-eyed herself, and reaching across the corpse grasped my hands.

I was profoundly affected, but the knife was now

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

in deep, so deep that temporizing would have been worse than useless and scant charity. Without undue force I could not untwine the fingers of the pleading woman, so bending, I raised her to her feet.

"Nay, Josephine, I do not hate you; that I say in all honor. Indeed, I would be your friend were friendship possible after this. I am but human. Had I known you as I know you now—as you are now—I might have proved the devotion I only pretended. But it is too late. Hate and love may be divided, but passion—never."

"Do you mean—do you mean——"

"I mean that I have more than fulfilled my mission. I mean that I met Annie Kronje; that I discovered her danger; that we escaped together; that I served her, and she has overpaid my service with herself."

"Annie Kronje?" She looked incredulous.

"Annie Kronje, otherwise Marian Romaine. Did not my cousin tell you?"

"Annie Kronje!" she repeated blankly. "Marian—little Marian! And she has paid you!"

"She has promised."

I said this very gently, and the effect was immediate, though not violent. She understood me, but she did not start or exclaim, or act as if she were about to faint. She only dropped my fingers as if they burned (her own were like ice), and stepped back a pace, her arms hanging helplessly at her sides. There she stood and searched my face with her great eyes, then turned them on the corpse. Not a word did she speak, but she remained for some time in that attitude, and when finally I stole out and left her

THE SWAN SONG

with her false, dead lover, she was still standing there and looking at him, apparently oblivious of my departure.

I was not surprised on going below to find Prince there. Nothing surprised me now. He had come with Josephine and my uncle, and stood holding the horse. There was no recounting of past experiences at this time, neither was I questioned about my stay above, though I had expected curiosity. I sent the slave back after my aunt at once, and with Marian left as a guard in the hall, the squire and I returned up-stairs.

Josephine had gone from the room, but I did not search for her. The dead man was still where he had fallen and we lifted him to the bed, closing his eyes and covering him decently. He was now so thin that he looked less like me, and his hair had grown wonderfully white within a fortnight. We left him to await the ministrations of his mother.

The element of danger from the military was remote, for if the guard about Tryon Hall had been withdrawn there were no soldiers nearer than Oyster Bay, and therefore we determined to abide where we were for the night, and then we three, Marian, the squire, and I, would start east on the morrow, borrowing, as we were pleased to call it, the horse and chaise. It was during the interim before my aunt's return that we recounted experiences. Knowing my pretended relation to Josephine, the squire had gone straight to her and had been welcomed, though he was surprised to find that she knew of the deception regarding his pretended death. She had kept the secret as close as I. He, in turn, had made

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

no mention of Marian, only assuring Josephine that I was well and had escaped capture. From her he learned of Colt's collapse and how he had been brought home on a horse-litter. He learned that it was from Josephine's intervention that Mrs. Jones had purchased the slaves, more to protect them from Colt than aught else. The stricken girl had laid golden plans for the future, but never did she drop a word of confession of her complicity in Colt's crime, though a daughter could not have been more devoted than she was to the squire. She had fully determined to cut away from her present surroundings and go with me to Connecticut when I returned, be my fortunes what they might. If only she might be allowed to serve was all she asked.

In my heart I forgave her, but I can not say that my conscience was entirely clear, for all that I tried to justify myself.

I did not see my aunt when she first came back, but I heard her low wailing as she and Nancy laid out the dead. At about eleven o'clock Prince came and said he could not find Josephine. At this a suspicion flashed through me that perhaps she would have her revenge by calling down the military, but I did not wrong her in thought for long, and disbelieved that the girl would so descend from the height she had climbed; besides, in my possession were the horse and chaise and also Colt's animal, which I had bid Prince fetch back with him when he brought my aunt.

I could not sleep that night. It would have been strange had I been able. By midnight the house was quiet. The storm, which had vented itself in clouds and lightning and a few rumbles of thunder,

THE SWAN SONG

but no rain, had passed, though ever and anon came a sullen flash that showed the forces above were yet active. If I had not been excited there was another reason which would have made sleep impossible. I was now fairly worried about Josephine. When Marian gave me her good-night kiss she told me she had not seen her since leaving the room. I searched the house, but did not find her. The sheet still hung at the window, but there was no reason why she should have climbed down that, like a thief. I met no one but my aunt, who began tearfully, yet not without venom, to explain that she was alone in the world through my doings, but, as she started to upbraid me further, I left her and went back to my own room.

For a long time I sat looking out at the landscape, which was brightened and blackened by turns. I should have been either more or less than human had I not been touched by the affection of the missing girl, although I could not reciprocate it, for a woman's love, even if unasked, is flattering to the masculine soul. Her mysterious disappearance more than interested me. I was actively apprehensive, but I failed to put my fears into definite form. I might have dozed finally, for I was terribly tired, but was brought to myself by the sound of singing—distant singing—that echoed through the still night with weird effect. I recognized the voice in an instant. No one but Josephine could sing like that, full-throated and rich; moreover, it was the melody she had often sung to me; the one that had bewitched me on the night of the raid, but its note of triumph was gone.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

I thrilled through every nerve. Hatless, I stole from the house and into the open. The song seemed now more distant, but appeared to come from a strip of woods that made toward the bay side. I ran over the wide meadow that intervened, each step bringing the voice clearer. As I reached the timber the song ceased, but presently began again, though it seemed far off now, as if the performer had flown away. The woods were fairly clear of underbrush, but I crashed through the little there was, guided only by the sound of the voice that seemed to drift farther as I advanced, and the occasional flash that shot from the clouds. Slowly I gained on it, and finally I broke into a savanna where a gleam of lightning showed me her white dress as it fluttered into the opposite cover. Pitch is not blacker than was the air when the lightning failed, but despite the risk of a fall, I ran across the opening calling the girl by name, the perspiration pouring from me. The song ceased. The woods echoed back my call, but no answer came, neither did I hear the sound of her going. I stood still and listened as I strove for breath. For several minutes all was silent, with the horrible hush of the forest, then she began again.

Had she floated through the air? Again the voice was afar. "Verlassen! verlassen!" She sung it as if her heart were bursting, and I thought mine would as I heard the wail of the singer. Forsaken! forsaken! Indeed, I know of no song so absolutely deep with melancholy, and as the long-drawn notes, like a hopeless cry, struck my ear, I became frightened at their intensity. The uncanny situation and the significant harmony made my hair bristle, and

THE SWAN SONG

beset by an inexpressible horror, I plunged through the woods and out into the open field again. There, once more, was her white dress distinct in a flash of the silent lightning, but I could not come up with her, strive as I would. At times I saw her flitting before me, still singing, and she apparently moving without exertion; the next instant the sound seemed to come from a mile away and her figure disappeared.

Like a will-o'-the-wisp she led me until my strength was spent, and by then the voice was faint either from distance or exhaustion. I thought it but an echo that my ear had become attuned to, and mayhap it was. It had ceased altogether when I finally gave over the chase, and the gray of dawn was over all the land by the time I got back to the house. Alive to a fear that was now only too well defined, I aroused Prince and made another effort to find the demented woman. Going to the spot where I had last seen and heard her, we beat the tongue of timber until we were sure it contained no human being save ourselves. There was no voice to guide us now. Then we came out to the shore of the bay. As I heard the sobbing of the slight swell that ran through the sedge along the lowland, I felt a clutch at my heart.

I did not look far then. I had no need. Just as the sun shot over the rim of land beyond the water I found her. She was lying face up in the shallow, where the tide had brought her, her black hair floating around her lovely head. She had been dead for hours and hours, Prince told me, and if so, then her swan song had been a dream of mine—a waking dream. God knows.

There was nothing to indicate a long wandering.

FOR A MAIDEN BRAVE

In her lifeless hand was clutched a black silk neck-cloth. We drew her ashore, and I opened the stiffened fingers and took it out. It was mine—the one I had worn through my adventures and discarded when but a short time before I had taken Colt's clothing. It was all she had received for her reward in this world. I think God had forgiven her, and I know that I prayed for my own forgiveness as I sank on my knees beside her lifeless though still beautiful form, and let the hot tears have their way.

.

This is all of my story. It is needless to tell of our further flight. It was immediate and without mishap. A month passed before I saw the old college town again and was welcomed back by Cogswell as if I had risen from the dead, and into the hands of his family, the only ones on whom I knew I could rely, I passed Marian, and with the squire started to worm my reward from the Government. I needed all the influence I could command, but finally I received the coveted treasure, a commission in the regular forces. And then I lighted the torch of success that has burned steadily since that day. I married Marian, and through her I have learned that life is more than living.

After the war, with all titles cleared, we returned to Long Island, where, in the old home, my unele wore out his years and where I bid fair to wear out mine. My aunt I never saw again, but I know she lived on a pension granted for life by her brother. Of the only man who disappeared from these pages after I struck him, history can tell. I mean William Chandler. When the British invaded New Haven it was

THE SWAN SONG

he who guided them past the defended bridge and up to the old Derby road. But it meant a life-long banishment from his native town and ostracism for his family. I do not know what became of him. Those wild days have long since passed away, and in their place have come years of quietude and plenty. I have lived to see the grave of Josephine sink to the level of the surrounding earth, even as hate is leveled by love. I think of her sadly and tenderly even now, and yet with a quickened throbbing of my pulse, for her image calls up the time when my blood was young, when I risked all for a maiden brave.

(3)

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